

Anselm Kiefer – Myth versus History

Dissertation

zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades

Doctor philosophiae

(Dr. phil.)

eingereicht an der

Philosophischen Fakultät III

der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

von

Lily Fürstenow-Khositashvili M. A.

Präsident der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

Prof. Dr. Christoph Marksches

Dekan der Philosophischen Fakultät III

Prof. Dr. Bernd Wegener

Tag der mündlichen Prüfung: 14.02.2011

Gutachter: 1. Prof. Dr. Thomas Macho
 2. Prof. Dr. Robert Kudiella

Contents

Foreword	5
Chapter I	13
Ways	
"Iconoclastic Controversy"	21
Chapter II	39
Landscapes	
Tabula Rasa	
The Ashen Landscapes	46
Resurrection	56
Landscapes with Graves	66
Operation Landscapes	68
Ascent	73
"Heavenly" Landscapes	78
Chapter III	87
Seascapes	
Velimir Khlebnikov	90
Hofmann von Fallersleben	95

Chapter IV	99
Books	
„Die Lesbarkeit der Welt“	
Merkawa	100
The Unspeakable, for Paul Celan	102
Martyrdom	110
Iconoclasm	118
Painting	120
The Hero	122
Chapter V	132
Pictura Poesis	
The Ladder and the Labyrinth	145
Athanor	151
Chapter VI	153
Sculptures and Installations	
Palaces	
Theatrum Naturae et Artis	168
"Verstummen der Natur"	171
Airplanes	180

The Archive	183
Epilogue	195
Bibliography	198
List of Illustrations	207

Foreword

Deserted landscapes bearing traces of wars and devastation, vast water surfaces emitting mysterious light, monumental corroded towers, dark starlit skies dotted with sunflower seeds, books made of cardboard, lead books, whole libraries made of steel, lead and splintered glass, dysfunctional lead air planes - Anselm Kiefer's works are disturbing, controversial, confusing. Their sheer size, their impressive monumentality dwarfs the spectator, conveying the feeling of insignificance of human existence as compared to the existence of the world. These works speak the unspeakable of death and of suffering related to the history of human existence in this world and simultaneously they overwhelm the silence of death by communicating with the viewer in a language of their own, communicating their message of remembrance, commemorating the absent. Kiefer's art books and paintings analyse the role of art in history, they imitate the ruthless handwriting of time, that leaves traces of destruction and ruin. Revelation or, to be more exact, the impossibility of revelation by means of art, as well as the inability of art to change either the world or the brutal course of human history, renders his works a sense of irony and melancholy. Related to the mysteries of existence encoded in the archetypal images of ancient mythologies, Kiefer's works create emotionally charged visual imagery that affects the spectator and offers reinterpretation of mythology. Both mythology and history appear in Kiefer's works staged, presenting a certain theatre of events, analysed by the artist, who questions the nature and the inner mechanisms of historical processes and the hidden meaning of esoteric myths. Kiefer does not illustrate myths or historical events, he neither emphasises "the enlightening aspect of myths revealing their inner structure as the paradigm of general and systematic world interpretation, in order to revive myths and save them for the present."¹ By constantly underlying ruin and fragmentation as the inevitable characteristics of history reflected in mythology, Kiefer emphasises the impossibility of understanding the ultimate meaning of myths as well as the impossibility of defining history as a meaningful progressive development. Art allows for reinterpretation of ancient myths and remembrance of historical events. In Kiefer's works such reinterpretation is ironic, loaded with various often contradictory, controversial meanings, designed to confuse the spectator. The progress of time in history is represented as the regress both physical and moral, evidenced in barbaric destruction of whatever has been created by man. Fragmentation of matter and of language, endless exile, collapse convey the experience of universal

¹ Zdenek Felix in Anselm Kiefer, Bücher, 1969-1990, p. 34

disorientation and despair in a world beyond human understanding and beyond representation. Creating an image in spite of the Biblical prohibition of creating one, representing the world that is apparently beyond representation, is for a painter a challenge that tests the limits of representational techniques. Anselm Kiefer questions not only the nature of the world, its history and mythology but, as a painter, he in the first place questions the essence of representation itself. In his photographs, collages, lead paintings with layers of organic and inorganic matter attached to the medial support (photograph, cardboard, canvas) the artist analyses representation and its role in history. He analyses the medium of painting and compares it to the media of mass reproduction such as photography, opposing both to the medium of the book. Kiefer analyses the ability of representational media to render history, and offers the spectator the history rendered by the media themselves, staged, distorted, fractured. For Kiefer painting symbolised by a winged palette is a pure, immaculate spirit, that like a divine creature hovers over the profane world. At the same time painting, contaminated by the barbaric history of fascism and devalued by the unspeakable tragedy of the Holocaust, is for a German painter associated with failure, falseness, guilt, desecration. Painting thus devalued and tainted appears in Kiefer's works isolated, buried deep down in a symbolic "tomb to the unknown painter" with the face of a Wehrmacht soldier. It is given no chance of resurrection. Burying, hiding in a tomb, however, does not mean forgetting. Anselm Kiefer wants his spectator to refresh the repressed traumatic memories of the past, to suffer experiencing these memories and to commemorate the sufferings of the absent. To paint in spite of the Nazi contaminated heritage, means for Kiefer to transform conventional painting techniques by breaking taboos, by silting, sedimentation, cauterisation - by making the barbaric handwriting of history a handwriting of his own, imprinted over the tormented picture surfaces. Representation, which is compared by Kiefer to the passage into the hidden and the unknown, like the door that is supposed to open the view into the inner nature of the world, is rendered as inadequate, unable to unravel the mysteries of the universe, incapable of presenting to the spectator the world picture. In fact the world picture in Kiefer's paintings is falling apart, fragmented and ruined, whereas representation cannot change or reverse this process except for imitating and creating a mere image of it. Making the technique of fragmentation and fracturing his basic method Kiefer imitates the irreversible, universal process of turning into ruin, the sign that time and history leave upon things. Even nature cannot overwhelm this basic tendency towards decay. Landscapes, plants, painted or dried, attached to canvases remain silent to the viewer in their mournful melancholy. They are

rendered muted, estranged, impartial. Nature is related by Kiefer to the black milk of Paul Celan's "Fugue of Death." Instead of nurturing and inspiring it is rendered poisonous: the organic is turned into the inorganic, the spoken into written, related to death. "Pictura poesis" does not poeticise nature any more but represents poetry as impossible, ruined and exiled both from land and from painting. Nature is depicted not blooming, fruitful but bare, fruitless and sleeping the impartial winter sleep, which corresponds to painting in critical stagnation, impartial, silenced by history and alienated from the world. The motive of sleep, death that was always underlying Kiefer's work as in "Grave of the Unknown Painter," or later in "Pietà" with the motive of death-like body as the main subject of the pictorial composition, Kiefer touches upon the theme of the death of the painter. It indicates the death of representation itself contaminated by the history of Nazism. Irrevocably related to history, its devastations and genocide, representation the way it was before has become irrelevant, being replaced by an artistic practice that Kiefer questions, doubts and mourns. Staging death, making death one of its basic subjects, is the attempt of representation to survive, to overwhelm the devastating course of history. Imitating death in painting appears as the possibility to continue existence and to evolve into something else. Yet the 'assumption', symbolised by Holy Mary with a winged painter's palette in Kiefer's paintings renders not so much the resurrection of painting but its disappearance and exile from the earthly realm. The symbol of painting - the lead palette - related to mythic Lilith is rendered by Kiefer in the process of constant exile within the world depicted as a bare landscape lost in time, offering no asylum and no promise. The Christian myth promising resurrection corresponding to the Kabbala myth promising restitution - *tikkun* - is rendered in Kiefer's art as an ideal, an absolute state that is inconceivable and unattainable in art, the same way as the ideals postulated by mythology are irrelevant, inconceivable and unattainable in human history, making myth collapse against the brutal reality of history, alienating one from the other and marking the ultimate fracture. Painting mounted on photography mounted on cardboard, on canvas or on lead appears like a screen creating the illusion of making visible the invisible, however it hides more than it reveals, emphasising nothing but an empty, abstract medial surface.

In Kiefer's works art, painting in particular, is thematised within the framework of the modernist, avant-garde tradition. The subject matter - mythological, historical, literary motives are rendered via the formal aspects - the composition, the colour pigment, revelation of the stages of making of the painting, the focus on the medium, on the surface texture, on

the form of the medial support, on the fabric of the picture surface and the attached objects. The transparent palette motive that often appears in Kiefer's works symbolises painting which itself is the major subject matter analysed by the artist in his works within the various historical and mythological contexts. The painter's palette serves in many cases as an eye offering a view onto the medial surface and beyond it - into the world with its scorched landscapes, murky waters, dark skies, whereas the polyhedron symbolises together with the aspect of wisdom, the unchangeable principles and criteria of quality, merit and taste in art, that have to be observed to enable art survive historical calamities. Kiefer introduces into his painting the radical vocabulary of avant-garde art. He reduces his paintings to mere blank medial surfaces of canvas, lead, document paper with organic and inorganic matter attached to it, revealing the raw texture, the medial support onto which image has to be projected. The artist emphasises the qualities of the colour pigment, the brushwork, the interplay of shapes and forms that produce a calculated visual effect. Kiefer's iconoclasm reveals itself not only in breaking taboos by dedicating his works to topics from German history, but also in his artistic approach: by cutting up, burning, collaging and tearing matter off from the medial surface. The rugged, uneven surfaces of his paintings, the superimposition of various layers, materials onto the canvas, the revelation of the various steps of making the painting evidence the artist's attempt to depict the process of imitating nature by means of painting. The evident break of the unity of his picture plane into separate geometrical components thematises painting as a radical and violent process. The barbarism and violence of history is thus conveyed by Kiefer in his paintings through the very mode of their execution: burning, fragmentation, sedimentation, cutting up canvases, rather than by means of mimetic representation. Kiefer's painting as violent, "barbaric," iconoclastic activity creates a tortured poetics of its own, that in this form only is able to survive Theodor Adorno's dictum on the impossibility of creating poetry after Auschwitz. Contaminated by the history of Nazism, painting itself for a painter remains the only subject matter that can be analysed within the artistic practise. Therefore it is the act of painting, symbolised by a palette, the process itself of creating a picture as an iconoclastic, violent activity, leaving traces of destruction upon the medial surface, that is important for the artist.

Art as an act of remembrance, mourning, commemoration and simultaneously art as self purpose, drawing upon the rich heritage of German and world painting, defining itself in the aftermath of historical catastrophes, from the very beginning of his artistic career till now is

one of the main subjects of Kiefer's works. If he portrays the palette as the monument to the "Unknown Painter" against the background of scorched earth or amid the ruins of the Third Reich architecture, based on the photographs of Albert Speer's buildings, the question is, if there should be something more to art than merely its quality. Shouldn't art be distanced from religion, politics, ideology or even moral, charged with the only task of being good? Isn't it sufficient just to create art about art, or art for art's sake? In her book on Anselm Kiefer Andrea Lauterwein argues for "the artist's responsibility both for the present *and* the future."¹ Art has criteria of merit based on centuries long history and tradition, that define the artist's major responsibility to observe these criteria, to draw upon the existing heritage and to reinterpret them in an innovative way adequate to the respective epoch. All other responsibilities relate to the spectator. The criteria of artistic merit are the permanent virtues, that are rooted in art history rather than in history of man. The artist's responsibility is in the first place limited to the artistic practice - a world of its own, which does not necessarily correspond to the world outside art. Painting has to be viewed by the viewer, it has to produce an emotional impact caused by the interplay of forms, shapes, colour. The basic virtues of painting are its formal qualities related to the content, the ability of the work of art to disturb, to produce an emotion within a spectator - these artistic virtues related to form, colour, composition, do not necessarily correspond to humanity's moral or religious virtues. The basic Christian virtues of "faith, hope, and charity", thematised by Kiefer in one of his earlier paintings, remain eternal, but they exist outside the artistic scope and painting is unable to force one observe them without falling into didactic and without sacrificing its artistic quality. Ascribing to art virtues and responsibilities that do not fall within the narrow artistic scope, contaminates it, puts it in ideological servitude. Art critic Leo Steinberg, whose analysis of contemporary art has considerably influenced the current research argued that "modern art always projects itself into a twilight zone where no values are fixed ... Contemporary art is always inviting us to applaud the destruction of values which we still cherish..."² In Kiefer's works both tendencies are evident. His techniques of cauterisation, sedimentation, flooding, reductionism applied to painting break the traditionally "cherished" values, which makes his art iconoclastic and taboo breaking. He pushes representation to the limits, by violating the established virtues he expands the possibilities of representation modifying and augmenting the existing criteria. Mythological, historical and religious motives have traditionally been subjects of representation, in his works Kiefer continues this tradition, but introduces

¹ Andrea Lauterwein, Anselm Kiefer Paul Celan, Myth, Mourning and Memory, p. 45

² Leo Steinberg, Other Criteria, pp. 10-15

unconventional methods of their rendering. Transformation - one of the recurrent themes with Kiefer applies not only to the mysterious processes of alchemy represented in his paintings related to Athanor, transformation in the first place applies to painting itself, that in its turn is supposed to transform the viewer.

It is one of the basic merits of art to respond to the challenges of the respective epoch, to revive the repressed traumatic memories in the spectator, to bring into discourse taboo topics or to expose barbarities of history. However art cannot change the world, it cannot affect the course of history or prevent the wars or violence in future. This is the cause of melancholy evident in almost all Kiefer's works. Except for creating a deep emotional impact in the spectator, art is not able to have any considerable impact on the course of historical events, its wars and brutalities. Art has always coexisted with them. In spite of all the knowledge kept in the books filling ancient libraries, in spite of the knowledge and wisdom encoded in the mythologies, in spite of the esoteric wisdom rendered in religious doctrines and irrespective of the outstanding works of art or literature created from antiquity till the present day, to which Kiefer alludes in his works, history is represented by the artist as a constant succession of wars and violence, causing suffering and death. It is the perception of history as a succession of barbarities that is shared with Walter Benjamin's "angel of history" whose face is turned towards the past. Although Kiefer does not directly quote Walter Benjamin, the experience of the future as the imminent catastrophe, the way it was revealed to Benjamin's "angel" is obvious in Kiefer's works with their focus on the past, on the ruin and on destruction as the marks of historical progress. Art imitates reality representing persons, mythological events or phenomena affecting the spectator emotionally. Questioning thus the nature of art and its role in human history Kiefer does not attempt to create beauty and harmony, he does not aestheticize death and ruin, but on the contrary, creates an experience of monotonous frustration, dissonance and disharmony in an attempt to render the truth about the failure of art to reveal the inner nature of historical catastrophes or to prevent them in future. In his works Kiefer focuses on the ruin and the inevitable disappearance of everything man-made, art inclusive, from the face of the earth not as the sign of weakness, but as the consequence of violence, of time, that can only be overwhelmed in language:

"Erreichbar nah und unverloren inmitten der Verluste
blieb dies eine: die Sprache" (Paul Celan).

Handwritten words, quotations from poetry that appear in Kiefer's paintings and art books evidence human presence encoded in language amid the topographies distorted by war so, that human presence is otherwise unimaginable there. Handmade inscriptions, like human traces over deserted, devastated terrains allude on the one hand to human presence and, on the other hand, to the higher divine presence - the word of God, simultaneously commemorating the dead. Language, that survives physical death, emerges in Kiefer's paintings as an aspect overwhelming time, as the only sign of life that overwhelms the muteness of death by suggesting the reader to whom the message of memory and mourning is communicated. Like representation, that imitates nature being its supplementary copy, writing as well is supposed to imitate speech, being its dead supplement (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*). Writing that appears on Kiefer's canvases, has thus double meaning: it is the sign of death, the brutal handwriting of history over the land, that replaces the lively speech by fragmenting it into mute, written signs imitating and supplementing it, on the other hand, writing as the human, bodily trace suggests reading that overcomes the silence of death and also stands for the higher, divine presence inscribed over the land and its representation: "Jaakobs himmlisches Blut, benedeiet von Äxten ..." (from "Schwarze Flocken," a quote from Paul Celan, the title of one of Kiefer's paintings).

The following chapters analyse Anselm Kiefer's works on the examples of his landscapes, art books, architecture paintings, sculptures and installations.

Chapter I

Ways

Painting is analysed in Kiefer's works as a passage, a way into the realm unknown and hidden from the eye of the spectator. Representation is thematised as a promise to make visible, to represent whatever has been invisible, in order to reveal the disguised and mysterious aspects of the world and its inner nature. In the picture "The Door" Kiefer thematises painting within artistic context as the medial surface on which representation is projected. The picture appears simultaneously flat and leading deep into the recess of the enclosed wooden interior. The oscillation between the illusory perspective and the actual flatness of the painting with hare-skin attached to the surface provides for the main tension in the painting. Kiefer creates the effect of sincerity of the medium, as if allowing the spectator to have a look at the inner nature of painting, offering a glimpse deep into the mysterious sub-medial space behind the door and beneath the medial surface, on the other hand the illusory perspective is broken by the pronounced two-dimensionality of the flat picture. What appears as the door is hare-skin mounted on burlap. The door that promises the insight into the inner realm of art, into the unknown sub-medial space traditionally hidden beneath representation is a sheer optical illusion. This mysterious door is rendered as a white blanc spot on the medial surface. The picture contains no figurative images, it appears as a promise of offering the viewer the inner space beyond the surface, which in spite of the promise remains hidden. The interior is reduced in the picture to strict geometric forms of squares and rectangles that imply the torture of the simple organic life subject to the austere rational geometric order, which in turn is counterpointed by the organic contours of the wood-grain. The effect of the painting's flatness is even more intensified by the hare-skin attached to the picture surface. The hare skin as the symbol of sacrifice with blood-drops smearing the wood panelling of the interior at the threshold by the mysterious door stands for the cultic sacrifice that reminds a ritual. It is also a sacrifice that an artist has to make for the sake of art, in order to cross the threshold and see the hidden realm beyond the metaphoric door. The art of painting is in this picture related to a mysterious cultic ritual, the way it used to be practised in times immemorial, painting as a ritual that Kiefer, a contemporary artist, attempts to revive and vest with the functions as urgent now as they might have been in times immemorial - those of revelation and salvation. "Nailed to the crossbar of the door, it hangs here as the "Lamb of God" and at the same time is a subtle play on the artist's existence ... The door acquires metaphorical import as the entry to

the no longer visible Beyond past the threshold. (As for the hare, this owns its renaissance to Joseph Beuys and actions like his particularly well-known "How to explain picture to a dead hare" at gallery Schmela, Düsseldorf, 1965).¹ (*Pic. 1. Die Tur (The Door), 1973, 300 x 220 cm, charcoal, oil, hare-skin on burlap, seamed together vertically, private collection*).

From such metaphoric threshold the spectator of Kiefer's works is invited to follow the symbolic "ways" that art made throughout history, the ways that can be defined literally and figuratively, as for example the ways from representation to abstraction, the ways from art as an aesthetic value in itself and art as the tool for ideological influence. The painting "Ways of Worldly Wisdom, Arminius's Battle" (*Wege der Weltweisheit - Hermanns-Schlacht*), is composed of simulated "woodcuts" - printed with emulsion on paper with the wood-grain patterns and portraits of famous German historical figures. The woodcut portraits are "themselves quotations from well-known portraits, they represent only the names of the forebearers thus summoned, rather than the converse which would have been to depict them in direct illustrative fashion."² The portraits in the "ways of worldly wisdom" represent a certain iconographic ballast accumulated over the centuries of German history and mythology. The square woodcuts based on portrait drawings Kiefer made of various German soldiers, poets, philosophers, statesmen, Nazis, industrialists are copied from famous portraits.² (*Pic. 2. Wege der Welt Weisheit: Hermannschlacht (Ways of Worldly Wisdom: Arminius's Battle), 1978, 300 x 300 cm, woodcut made up of 31 parts glued together, blotting and hand-made paper overpainted with acrylic and shellac with inscription "Wege der Weltweisheit: die Hermannsschalcht," Collection Doris and Charles Saatchi, London*)

Rectangular woodcuts are attached to the the canvas, arranged around a forest made up of a group of vertical lines of tree trunks on fire. "The medium woodcut - the simplest and the most original of all print techniques, has something archaic about it, a 'Germanic' aura, so familiar that it almost verges on the banal."³ It revives in memory aspects of German mythology and history, from the prominent public figures and poets to the devastations of the World War II. The handwritten title of the painting "Wege der Weltweisheit: die Hermanns-Schlacht" (Ways of Worldly Wisdom, Arminius's Battle) appears at the bottom of the canvass.

¹ Jürgen Harten, Renata Sharp, Anselm Kiefer, State Art Gallery, Dusseldorf, p. 26

² The "woodcuts" represent the images of Kant, Krupp, von Schlieffen, von Roon, Jakob Böhme, Morike, von Droste-Hulshoff, A. Stifter, Otto von Bismarck, Jean Paul, Eichendorff, Stefan George, C.F. Meier, von Clausewitz, Fichte, Hoffmann von Fallersleben, Grabbe, Kleist, von Groitzsch, Hermann, Hölderlin, Klopstock, G. Herwegh, H. Wessel, Schlageter, W. Flex, Freiligrath, G. Keller

³ Peter Schjeldahl, Anselm Kiefer, Bücher, 1969-1990, p. 20

A series of black lines and rings painted over the woodcut portraits imitates the rounded contours of a palette with the dark spot of the forest in the middle forming the palette's eye. The rounded palette-like contours painted over the wood-grain portraits form the surface of the painting. The palette thus encompasses the whole canvass, emphasising the flatness of the two-dimensional surface. The impression is that the palette contours, crossing the woodcut portraits beneath, render the portraits as second-rate, kitschy woodcut images as compared to the authentic purity of painting symbolised by the palette. It is not each particular portrait that is important for the artist but the modified visual experience engendered by the repeated wood-grain pattern. This pattern is the decorative motive as well as the main theme of the painting - the ambiguous "way of wisdom" within a vicious circle, reiterating the rounded contours of an artist's palette. The flat palette coincides with the flat canvass itself. The painting's composition excludes any deepness or perspective, these are replaced by the pure visual experience of observing its wood grain motives, imposed over the picture surface which is divided into rectangles. The painting thus produces an effect of vibration. The rationalised grid-like arrangement of its components - separate rectangles containing portraits, that are arranged vertically and horizontally to fill the whole canvas, are counterpointed to the rounded shape of the palette and the flowing contours of the wood-grain. The palette represents the flat medial surface - the painter's main medium on which images are projected. The two planes of the painting - the genuine art symbolised by the palette on the first plane and the secondary plane of the wood-cut portraits, symbolising kitsch and ideological propaganda, supported by the Nazi "blood and soil" policy - reveal the major discrepancies within the German cultural tradition. These fundamental discrepancies reveal a civilisation, that started at the inception point of the Arminius's battle and gradually degraded. Kiefer in his "Ways of Worldly Wisdom," manifested the German cultural heritage in its present state as the kitsch on the woodcut. The painting is not so much about the identity of each of the portrayed but about the whole set of the portrayed altogether as a surface, a façade hiding the contradictions within the core of the nation. The work manifests the nation's overall unified schematic picture (Gesamtbild) - the surface of a German civilisation that turned out to be a civilisation skin deep, superficial and flat the same way as the flat woodcut portraits making up the surface of a two-dimensional canvass. Kiefer's portraits of the historical persons in the "Ways of Worldly Wisdom" repeat the technique he used in portraying peasants from the book "The Face of the German People, Coal for 2000 Years."

Portraying prominent historical figures using the similar techniques as by portraying the peasants Kiefer creates a portrait of a nation that in spite of its surface appearance of unity is irrevocably split. The surface unity is merely an optical delusion achieved by the uniformity of the wood-grain patterns. It is interrupted by the rectangular grid, rationally appointing each portrait its respective historical role, importance and consequently prominence within the compositional arrangement. The integrity of the picture surface is broken into geometric segments. The formal unity of the nation in its "ways of worldly wisdom" symbolised by the repetitive wood-grain pattern is only an appearance that hides from the spectator the inner nature of the nation, that remains dark, contradictory, divided, unknown the same way as whatever appears on the medial surface does not necessarily represent the inner nature of the medium.

Kiefer's introduction into the "Ways of Worldly Wisdom, Arminius's Battle" of the wood-cut motive and of the Germanic legend as the elements of kitsch, crossed out by the palette's contours is still relevant. Kitsch is still the inevitable component of mass culture. The degradation of genuine, centuries old artistic traditions into the mainstream culture is thematised by the artist as the ambiguous "way of worldly wisdom" from "Arminius's battle" through fascist kitsch till contemporary mainstream art. The cultural policy implemented by the fascist regime in Germany created the effect of the masses ruling. The centuries-old values, traditions and criteria in art were violated. The industrial revolution that allowed for certain democratisation of culture, the introduction of general education, caused at the same time the drastic degradation of taste, of quality in art, leading to the all-round triumph of kitsch. Unlike genuine art, the understanding of which requires special education as well as certain emotional effort on the part of the spectator, kitsch is easily understandable by masses. If in the fascist Germany kitsch was the official cultural policy, it is because it is the culture of the masses. The regime that sets itself the aim to identify with the masses in order to influence and manipulate them, uses kitsch for state propaganda.

The myth of "Notung" - has been rendered by Kiefer as the representation of the sword smeared with blood and stuck hopelessly into the wood panelling in the foreground of an empty attic. Notung - the magic sword "stands for the revolutionary promise, as well as for its 'fateful' failure: as the persecuted Siegmund was going to use the sword in highest need 'in höchster Not' according to Wagner, Wotan had to break it with his spear, in order to keep it for

Siegmond and Siegelinde's son, Siegfried, who was the only one capable of putting the broken pieces together to forge the sword anew."¹ The sword thus a magic piece of workmanship - a work of art in fact - is attributed here magic powers of salvation. Yet its failure, is interpreted by Kiefer as the failure of art, to save in the moment of "highest need." It makes one doubt the redemptive powers of art. For Anselm Kiefer - a painter, this failure spelled out in the Notung myth - the failure of art to fulfil the expectations of salvation is the cause of disillusionment, irony and mourning. By painting the scene in the attic with the abandoned sword stripped of its magic powers he questions not only the meaning and the mission of the Germanic myth but in the first place the role of art and its ability to keep its metaphoric "promise." The resemblance of the attic to an abandoned opera stage is not accidental, the allusion to Wagner's cycle of four epic operas "Der Ring der Nibelungen" (The Ring of the Nibelungs) based on the Germanic mythology is obvious here. It is not only the art of painting or of ancient craftsmanship that is doubted here but Wagner's heritage as "Gesamtkunstwerk" that claimed to reveal and to save the German spirit. Without the promised redemptive powers the blood smeared sword appears to be a mere weapon - a tool for violence and bloodshed. In the "Notung" the salvation is staged, whereas the sword, a mere piece of theatrical requisite, is stuck hopelessly in the attic, in the collective subconscious symbolised by this abandoned wooden interior. It is not only the sword itself that attracts the attention in Kiefer's painting, but the wood grain fabric that makes up the complex texture of the picture surface. This complicated surface texture, broken by the austere geometric forms shaping the wooden interior, thematises the theme of the Germanic mythology related to "Notung" - the disparity in a single cultural tradition that gave rise to the myth, to Wagner's operas and to the appropriation of these by the Nazi ideology. The complicated wood-grain pattern of the attic panelling and the handwritten inscription "Notung!" in the right part of the canvas underlies the flatness of the painting. The pronounced flatness of the picture is counterpointed with the deep recess leading the eye inside the interior which is represented foreshortened. The painting thus oscillates between flatness and depth of perspective. The effect of vibration between the three-dimensional spatial deepness and the flatness of the picture plane creates visual tension that translates the dramatic contents of the myth into the formal language of art. The figurative component - the interior, the perspective are still easily recognisable, yet the emphasis the artist puts on the texture, the meticulously represented wooden fabric as well as the various layers of meaning that are related to the work delineate the artist's interest not only in the subject matter but in the medium itself, in the visual effect the painting's surface

¹ Toni Stooss, in Anselm Kiefer, Bücher, 1969-1990, p. 31

produces. The space of the attic is arranged in the form of rectangles making an illusion of perspective. Yet this perspective is as illusive as "the promise" of the father inscribed in the upper part of the painting: "A sword promised me the father" (Ein Schwert verhieß mir der Vater). (Pic. 3. *Notung*, 1973, 300 x 432 cm, charcoal, oil, charcoal drawing of sword on cardboard collaged onto burlap, in the upper side in the middle inscription "Ein Schwert verhieß mir der Vater; on the right over the sword inscribed: "Notung!" Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam)

Likewise the painting "Germany's Spiritual Heroes" made in 1973 creates the illusion of deep perspective, at the same time ironically questioning the deepness of German cultural tradition. The "spiritual heroes" are effaced beneath the texture of the wood-grain dominating the painting. The picture plane is broken into an orderly succession of geometric forms that give the impression of the recessive space. An illusory cultural perspective coincides on the picture surface with the illusory perspective of the painted interior underlying the disparities of a cultural-spiritual tradition that gave rise to fascism. Kiefer refers to the German spiritual values as relative values within a culture that is reduced on the picture plane to its raw material condition of a wood pattern - a simulacrum of a genuine culture. In this way he traces "the ways of worldly wisdom" within a cultural perspective, by accentuating the medium: the texture of the painting's surface, the wood grain motive, the visual effect, the method of execution of the work comparing the illusory effect of the vantage point perspective with the illusion of high civilisation.

Kiefer's homage to Piet Mondrian reveals his adherence to the principles of classic avant-garde. By emphasising the rough gestural brushwork, the colour pigment on the painting's surface, by revealing in the books the process of transformation of the photographed images from page to page, Kiefer imitates and makes evident the process itself of creating an artwork. In doing so he imitates the process of divine creation, bringing a mythological-spiritual dimension into his works. Like in the works of avant-garde artists, in Kiefer's abstract works the subject matter is often rendered not in the narrative but via the method of execution and via the medium, "the very processes by which art and literature have already imitated the former (reality). These themselves become the subject matter of art and literature. If, to continue with Aristotle, all art and literature are imitation then what we have here is the imitation of imitating."¹ It is well known that the traditions of modernism were brutally

¹ Clement Greenberg, John O'Brian, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 1, p. 9

persecuted by the Nazis in Germany at the expense of the reactionary state policy of "blood and soil." This policy turned the cultural landscape of Germany into the fertile soil for the mass culture, that turned the myth of the Arminius's battle into a component of a theatrical Nazi kitsch that further lead to the staged burnings of books in front of the public, persecution of artists, symbolised in the "Ways of Worldly Wisdom - Arminius's Battle" by the fire.

The opposition between the avant-garde art and the state supported fascist kitsch is stylistically evident in Kiefer's "Ways of Worldly Wisdom" in the opposition between the motive of the woodcuts and the modernist tradition of painting that focused on the artistic medium - the flat empty surface, the pigment, the combination of forms and contours. In the "Ways of Worldly Wisdom" this opposition is evident in counterpointing the wood-grain texture to the emphasised flatness of the two-dimensional painted surface, in the opposition between the rounded pattern of the wood-grain and the rectangular contours of the portraits reiterating the shape of the medial support. The woodcut was claimed by the Nazis to be the symbol of genuine German artistic spirit. The tradition of making woodcuts revived by the Nazis thus has connotations of racial superiority, intolerance towards the art of other nations and ideological propaganda elements. In the painting the incongruity between the rounded palette-like outlines that coincide with the flat picture surface and the composition that rejects deepness and three-dimensionality emphasises the opposition of the genuine avant-garde art to the contaminated artistic heritage of the Nazi regime.

On the example of the "ways of worldly wisdom" one can trace the "ways" Anselm Kiefer himself made in his artistic career from the earlier paintings to the later topics and modes of their representation. The adherence to the principles of modernism that revealed itself in earlier works continued. It became particularly evident in the so-called lead paintings made in the 1980s: "Fallen Pictures", 1986, "Women of the Revolution", 1991, "Melancholia," 1988. In these works Kiefer like avant-garde artists, accentuates the raw material the painting is made of, the empty flatness of the medial surface, the visual experience caused for instance by the rectangular frames. He makes evident the process of creation of an artwork by underlying the roughness of the texture and the traces of the artist's activity on the picture surface. If the painting "Ways of Worldly Wisdom - Arminius's Battle" was saturated with images to the extent that this saturation made each particular image an insignificant component within the

grid-like composition, with its pronounced flatness, the work "Fallen Pictures" is a further step in Kiefer's "iconoclasm." The painting "Fallen Pictures" renounces a mimetic image. The work comprises several picture planes: the surface of lead, that offers the spectator a deeper view into the intermediary level - a rectangular picture beneath the surface that contains fallen picture frames and finally the third plane - a dark supposedly sub-medial space beneath the second picture plane. If in the "Ways of Worldly Wisdom" Kiefer renounces the deepness, accentuating the medial surface of the painting that thematises the superficial surface character of the German civilisation, the rectangular cave-like space, ominously looming in the "Fallen Pictures" creates an effect of offering an inside view penetrating beyond the transparent medial surface. The lead painting "Fallen Pictures," as the title implies, suggests "the fall" or the "crisis of easel picture"¹ schematically rendered as fallen picture frames. In this work Kiefer demonstrates the destruction of the traditional picture surface, radical reduction resulting in elimination of the image. At the expense of the "fallen pictures" the work creates the effect of revealing the inner aspect of the artistic medium hidden beneath the represented image. The "Fallen Pictures" is a picture that thematically continues Kiefer's earlier topic of "iconoclastic controversy" till the point when representation is cancelled. The spectator is confronted here with the limited, framed, but empty pictorial surfaces: a painting within a painting within a painting, where each previous picture is the frame of the following, whereas the surface itself is rendered blank, empty, ambiguously transparent. The painting oscillates between its implied depth and the obvious flatness of the rough lead surface, which appears to be the passage, an ambiguous way, offering a view further deep into the cave-like sub-medial space which is unknown and dark. This suggested sub-medial space beneath the surface appears as the inner nature of the medium, that is traditionally hidden beneath the image painted on the surface. Yet here as a result of "the fall of the picture" or of the iconic pictorial image, the medial surface appears revealed. On the one hand Kiefer emphasises in this work the pure surface, the rectangular frontal aspect of the lead/canvass, its flatness, two-dimensionality and emptiness of the fallen flat frames. On the other hand he creates the effect of a deep recess into the dark inner core beneath the flat surface. The deep dark sub-medial space beyond the picture's empty surface seems threatening. The pictorial medium's inner nature does not necessarily coincide with the surface appearance, the same way as the nation's generalised portrait on a woodcut surface does not coincide with the inner controversial core in the "Ways of Worldly Wisdom." The painting "Fallen Pictures" is profoundly ambiguous: it

¹ The crisis of the easel picture (Die Krise des Staffeleibildes,) in "Die Essenz der Moderne" Clement Greenberg, John O'Brian. Vol. 2, p. 221

creates an effect of laying bare the medium, without actually revealing anything. Its illusion of deepness is a purely optical effect projected onto a flat lead surface. The work reveals nothing but the illusion of revelation. The traditional myth of transparency and clarity ascribed to pictorial representation and to photography, is once more destroyed or "fallen."

"Iconoclastic Controversy"¹

Discussing the development of modern painting from the end of the nineteenth century on, art critic Clement Greenberg mentioned the purposeful elimination by modernist painters of the three-dimensionality and deepness in representation, the introduction of the repetitive monotony of the motives scattered all over the flat painted surface, the reduction of painting to the sheer texture, to rough brushwork, to colour, to a complicated fabric made up of various similar units.² The influence of modernism reveals itself in most of Kiefer's works in the pronounced flatness of the pictures, tendency towards abstraction, emphasis on the medial support and the rough texture of the picture surface, the tendency towards reduction of the representation to geometric shapes as in paintings "Women of the Revolution," "Osiris," "Jerusalem," "Lilith", "Melancholia" where traditional motives from mythology and history are rendered in a formal language introduced by the avant-garde. In these works the contours, lines, the combinations of form are emphasised together with the complicated texture of the painting, inscriptions, or ready-made objects attached to the surface.

The essence of the iconoclastic controversy of the 8th century remains crucial for Kiefer - a contemporary painter. The controversy deals with the nature of representation in general, the authenticity of a painted image versus the meaning contained in word, the ability of an image to reveal the truth, the correspondence of the painted image, the signifier to the sign it represents. In the 8th century it was the word of the Bible opposed to the image of Jesus and the saints represented in the icons, which the iconoclasts claimed as evil, deceptive and idolatry. In contemporary image saturated epoch the cycle of Kiefer's works on this centuries old topic is the artistic research into the basic essence of representation as the source of creativity, inspiration and at the same time the tool for manipulation and influence upon the spectator, the means for political or commercial propaganda: image versus the written word. It

¹ "Bilderstreit" in German is the title of a whole cycle of Kiefer's paintings and art books, related to the iconoclastic controversy that took place in Byzantine in the 8th century C. E.

² Clement Greenberg, John O'Brian, "Modernist Painting," (1960) Vol. 4, p. 85

is not accidental that among Kiefer's works dedicated to the theme of the iconoclastic controversy there are both paintings and books, both analyse representation as the cause of violence with the palette painted over the book pages as an ambiguous, controversial symbol the authenticity of which is severely doubted. Representation limited to the art-book format in Kiefer's iconoclastic controversy series cancels the advantage of an image over the written word contained in the book, particularly since the pages with images also carry handwritten inscriptions made by the artist. The book format allows thus both reading and viewing. It brings the two media painting and written word together. Anselm Kiefer doubts the authenticity of the image however he does not renounce painting, in his iconoclastic books page after page he spells out his doubt and irony about the violent history of representation turned into codified message contained in a book. It is the artist's attempt to reinvent representation out of its violent history, to create it anew in spite of the historical inequities, an attempt to create a link between a painting and a book, an artistic endeavour to make an image that would equal the word in its authenticity and straightforwardness. In the wake of the modernist tradition it can only be achieved by means of severe reduction of an image to its basic core, to elementary reductionist shapes, lines and forms that accentuate the medial support and the painting's surface as in the works of avant-garde artists like Mondrian, whom Kiefer dedicates his homage.

In the lead painting "Women of the Revolution" Kiefer combines welded lead picture frames, glass, a wood-and-metal digging tool, dried lilies-of-the-valley and a rose against a background of lead sheets with names written over it. The unity of the composition is broken, the surface is composed of reiterating rectangular shapes - picture frames - arranged to produce a certain rhythm. The repetitive motive of the picture frames with attached dried plants on the flat two-dimensional surface commemorates not only the "women of the revolution" but "the revolution" that avant-garde made in painting. Like modernist painters, Kiefer violates the traditional rules of composition by attaching to the monochrome picture surface sets of identical, similar elements and forms. In the "Women of the Revolution" Kiefer combines ready-made objects: welded lead picture frames, glass, a digging tool against a background of rolled lead sheets. The picture frames that Kiefer appropriates for this work create within the given context a memorial. There are no painted representations of the women indicated in writing. The frames are empty, the spectator is confronted with the surface that supposes painting but bears no signs of it. Painting is extremely reduced in this

work to its mere surface, the framed medial support free of any representation. Thus the artist leaves the spectator free to imagine "the women of the revolution" without framing our minds with staged and manipulated imagery. Like the carbonised black pages of his cauterised books, the empty framed surfaces of "Women of the Revolution" once more thematise the medium, empty surface on which painting is projected. By viewing the surface free of images the spectator can get a glimpse into the inner nature of the medium of painting that cannot be represented or communicated by means of conventional painterly means and is generally hidden beneath the image. The empty, framed picture surfaces open up the sacral aura that is traditionally disguised beneath the layer of representation, that is often staged and manipulated. By freeing his paintings from image representation, Kiefer creates thus the effect of particular openness, sincerity of the medium. In this work Kiefer not only appropriates the ready-made frames but also the language of the medium itself, which is quite a "revolutionary" method introduced first by the avant-garde art. Instead of imposing on the spectator the women images of his own making, Kiefer allows the medium itself to speak for itself in commemorating the women. Such authentic communication with the spectator, the communication that emphasises the language of art that coincides with the language of the artist, speaks at best the artist's message. *(Pic. 4. Die Frauen der Revolution (Women of the Revolution), 1991, 240 x 400 cm, acrylic on lead, glass, wood, lead, lilies of the valley and a rose, private collection)*

The angular shape of the polyhedron in the lead painting "Melancholia" made in 1988 partially reiterates the angular shape of the canvass, emphasising the medium. Repeated in various configurations, as fragmented pieces of the whole and scattered all over the monochrome lead surface, the polyhedron patterns create the effect of ruined unity of the representational image against the picture plane. Each part, each component of the picture is equally important or "equivalent" making up a complicated fabric, where each single unit represents an important component of the whole work. This method of painting can be regarded as the revolutionary "way" that painting made through avant-garde from Durer's "Melancholia" to the "Melancholia" of Anselm Kiefer. This "way" is the one from traditional painting to avant-garde, the way that thematises painting through the history of its existence up to now. What remains of Durer's "Melancholia" is its essence - the polyhedron, as the symbol of merit in painting, indicating the artistic virtues, that can be modified in various historical epochs but do not cease to affect the spectator emotionally, the basic aspects of

composition, proportion, shape that although transformed in time and reinterpreted by artists, enables art to survive. Kiefer's "Melancholia" emphasises not one particular iconic image, but the whole complicated fabric of the surface made up of angular forms composing a geometric abstraction projected upon a flat, roughly textured medial support of the painting. The picture surface becomes the show place of forms making up a complex combination of lines, squares, rectangles that balance each other fading in or fading out against the monochrome grey picture plane. Kiefer's melancholy in the "Fallen Pictures," in "The Women of the Revolution," or in "Melancholia" is the sadness over the squandered heritage of avant-garde art, that at least in its own artistic medium attained certain effect of medial sincerity. (*Pic. 5. Melancholia, 1988, 170 x 230 cm, ash on photography on lead in glassed steel frame, Hara Museum of Art, Japan*)

Kiefer's iconoclasm began not with the set of works dedicated to "the iconoclastic controversy" of the eighth-ninth centuries but with his "Occupations." The initial iconoclasm was manifested by breaking the taboos related to the topic of Germany's Nazi past. In Kiefer's homages to Piet Mondrian, one can recognise the influence of the avant-garde painter. "Piet Mondrian - Arminius's Battle" (1976) is made up of vertical and horizontal lines that cross, forming the grid-like surface of the painting similar to the austere geometric elements in Mondrian's pictures. The tree trunk, that is the central vertical axis of the painting, is reduced to a thick vertical line - a component of the grid that divides the flat painted space into rectangular segments. Kiefer manifests here representational painting transforming into abstraction by means of austere geometric contours imposed upon the image of a tree.¹

The painting shows the transformation of representation into a geometric abstraction as the move of avant-garde against the overall deterioration of quality in painting. "Piet Mondrian - Arminius's Battle" reveals Kiefer's adherence to modernist painting, which obtained its most radical form in the works of Mondrian. In Kiefer's artistic practice abstract painting opposes the ideology influenced mimetic representation supported in the Nazi Germany, where avant-

¹ According to Matthew Biro's description: "... thought in terms of the history of the twentieth-century painting, Kiefer's painting represents the regression of geometric abstraction back to another basic motif from which Mondrian developed it, namely, trees." Biro, Matthew, Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger, p. 115. In terms of Kiefer's artistic practice it is evident that he gradually, from painting to painting, reduces mimetic representation to abstraction. This tendency is obvious in his homage to Piet Mondrian, where the elements of a geometric abstraction are imposed upon the tree image, curbing its natural form. In addition in his later works after "Piet Mondrian - Arminius's Battle" (made in 1976), non-figurative abstract motives played a more significant role in Kiefer's painting than mimetic representation as for example "Tree with Palette" made in 1978, where the tree is rendered even more non-figurative and abstract.

garde art was proclaimed as decadent. "Arminius's battle" mentioned in the title represents in this context not only the battle at the inception of a German nation, but also the "battles" of modernism at the inception of avant-garde against conventional methods of representation. For Kiefer these are the "battles" of avant-garde against the desecrating influence of kitsch on art, which in painting is of the same importance now as "Arminius's battle" was for the inception of the German nation back in the 9th century B.C. (*Pic. 6. Piet Mondrian - Arminius's Battle, 1976, 254 x 112,5 cm, oil on canvas, inscription below on the right side: "Piet Mondrian." Collection Geert Jan Visser, Belgium*)

Unlike modernist abstractions, the images that appear on the surfaces of canvases, photographs or book pages created by Kiefer, are essentially manipulated and staged. Whatever appears on the medial surface does not correspond to the medium's inner nature, and therefore can in no way serve as the medium's message. The discrepancy between the artistic medium and its message is manifested by Kiefer in most of his works. This is the basic essence of his "iconoclastic controversy," that persists for Kiefer from the times of Byzantine iconoclastic controversy of the 8th century C. E. till today. Most of his works are staged, the viewer's gaze is manipulated by the perspective, by the arranged settings, by the gestures and clothes that the artist wears as for example in his "Occupations."

The whole set of paintings dedicated to "iconoclastic controversy" thematises not only the religious struggle between iconoclasts and their opponents for and against representation but manifests the controversial character of representation itself projected onto a medial surface, subject to manipulation, religious or political. It is only in the works where the medial surface is freed from any iconic images, like in the works of the avant-garde painters that the effect of the medium appears identical to its message.

In this regard Marshal McLuhan's famous claim: "the medium is the message" from his book "Understanding Media" appears heavily indebted to avant-garde painting. The effect of the sincerity of the medium provided by modernist painting is caused by the specific artistic techniques and rigorous methods that were practised by the avant-garde artists: reduction, fragmentation, cutting to pieces, collaging. Modernist painters managed to turn their artistic medium into their message. This context enabled McLuhan, who wrote his book after the emergence of modernist painting, to claim that the medium was the message. This cornerstone

characteristic of avant-garde art that by the use of special artistic techniques laid bare its own artistic medium, making it identical to its message, was applied by McLuhan to the entire world of complex contemporary media without subjecting its complexity to the same procedures of extreme reduction and fragmentation practised by the avant-garde art.¹ By the time Kiefer created his works on "iconoclastic controversy" in the contemporary epoch, state-of-the-art media have achieved the grade of sophistication that leaves the question of their sincerity irrelevant and highly doubtful. It is only painting, in case it is extremely reduced, freed from any signifiers, images, etc. that can create the effect of sincerity and of the message that coincides with the medium, as for example the works of Mondrian, Malevich or Kiefer's reductionist works emphasising the medial support.

The two media: painting and photography are compared in Kiefer's works as to their ability to truly represent reality. Photography that is claimed to represent objective reality by means of the camera lens - the camera objective - can in fact be profoundly manipulated, whereas painting can be ideologically influenced and used to serve political propaganda. Here again the painter deals with the issue of revelation of the objective reality by means of representation, an attempt to make visible the invisible aspects of reality. If in paintings dedicated to mythological themes the invisible aspects of the divine mysterious realm are intended to be made visible as in the pieces related to the Kabbala or to the Osiris myth, in the works dedicated to historical events the task of painting is to reveal, make visible by various means of representation - photography, painting, collage, ready-mades, the historical truth otherwise hidden from the spectator. The task that according to Kiefer art has to perform, but which he questions in the aftermath of fascism and the Holocaust. The painting "Iconoclastic Controversy" (1980) is based on a photograph of a staged battle with toy tanks in Kiefer's studio. The painting is flat, frontal, two-dimensional, the battle with toy tanks, placed on the wooden background is a staged spectacle. The secret force behind the curtains however, that manipulates the spectacle of this "controversy," is not revealed. The space in the background of the painting that supposes to reveal the inner nature of the medium - the backstage - remains dark, impenetrable for the viewer. Therefore whatever is the message that appears on the surface of the painting it is unlikely to represent the inner nature of representation itself, the same way as the names of those involved in "the iconoclastic controversy" do not reveal to the spectator their true inner motives or real historical facts about the causes and consequences of the controversy. Kiefer generalises in his controversy series the basic

¹ Boris Groys, *Unter Verdacht, Eine Phänomenologie der Medien*, pp. 96-98

characteristics of any ideologically driven controversies throughout history, their violent character, futility and personal ambitions of those involved. The case of iconoclastic controversy is particularly exemplary since it deals with the nature and function of representation itself. The iconoclasts renounced the icons of Jesus and of the saints as false and evil idols, unable to reproduce the true image of the divine, whereas the iconodules venerated the images of the divine, claiming that the representations of the Saviour and of the saints are as sacred and revelatory as the Biblical word. For Kiefer as painter iconoclastic controversy is up to now of crucial importance, since it attempts to analyse the inner nature of representation - its ability to reveal the true image as claimed by the iconodules, its ability to represent the historical truth as attempted by Kiefer himself in his works. The evil, deceptive character of representation is opposed to the truth of the divine Biblical word. Such analysis of representation is particularly poignant in the aftermath of fascism that tainted representation.

The "controversy" itself is rendered in the painting in its form rather than in content. The greater part of the painting is made up of an abstract wood-grain surface pattern divided into geometrical segments that converge in the centre. The pronounced motive of the wood grain gives the painting the effect of flatness that contradicts the suggested illusion of the perspective into the depth of the stage-like space. Iconoclastic tension is created here by the oscillation between the illusory depth of the painting and its actual flatness, by turning the painting's surface into a space for contradictory interplay of mimetic motives such as tanks versus abstract elements like the wood grain pattern, the dark colour pigment, the inscription in the lower left corner, that emphasises the flatness of the picture. The palette contours that encircle the whole stage with the battle tanks, the geometric forms as well as the inscription exclude the effect of three-dimensionality and emphasise the painter's medium against the broken integrity of the picture plane. The choice of the palette - the main medium of the painter's craft as the motive dominating the composition in "Iconoclastic Controversy" series, makes up the core of iconoclasm thematised by Kiefer. He makes painting itself the major subject matter of his paintings. In his "iconoclasm" the painter attempts to free painting from ideological or religious constraints imposed on it through history except for the restrictions of formal, aesthetic quality. The "iconoclastic controversy" is reduced to the battle over the palette - symbolising the authenticity of representation versus the holy scripture and versus the ideologically imposed constraints. It is the "iconoclastic" battle over the palette to allow

painting represent itself rather than religious or political messages. (*Pic. 7. Bilderstreit, (Iconoclastic Controversy), 1976-1977, 325 x 330 cm, oil on canvas, with inscriptions: "Theophilos, Photios, Johannes v. Damaskos, Theodos Studites, Leo III, Artavasdos, Theoktistos, Theodora, Staurakios, Theodoros Melissenos," Collection Doris and Charles Saatchi, London*)

Likewise in the painting "Tree with Palette," made in 1978, the heavily worked surface represents an abstract picture plane to which a lead palette is attached. The rectangular form of the tree replicates the form of the canvass. The fabric of the surface is heavy with a thick layer of paint applied to the canvass, the picture is two-dimensional, up-front, without any illusive perspective. This gesturally articulated surface extending at places several inches above the canvass, composed of the gashed masses of paint draws the main attention due to its physical aspect, the rough thick layers of paint and a lead object applied to the surface. Thus the mimetic representation of a tree is "iconoclastically" destroyed, the image is reduced to a rough picture surface that thematises the act of painting, the process of applying pigment with brush onto the surface, the tangible roughness which imitates the texture of raw wood. What is implied here by the lead palette on the painted surface - is painting representing and analysing itself within the context of modernist reduction of form. The tree motive also implies the first abstractions with tree patterns made by Piet Mondrian, when he destroyed the conventional representation turning it into an interplay of lines, colours and geometric forms.

Mondrian changed the basic principles of easel painting in the most radical way. In his works he emphasised the flat medial surface of the painting. Based on strong dominating shapes, originating from crossed over straight lines and coloured rectangles, that form the most simplified and balanced paintings possible, his works present themselves as the show-places of forms and not as unified, undivided pieces of texture. The vertical line that coincides with the massive tree trunk overlapped with horizontal lines in Kiefer's "Piet Mondrian - Arminius's Battle" turns the painting into a flat surface with superimposed angular motives that attempt to divide and disintegrate the image into a geometric abstraction.

Like in the paintings of avant-garde artists, in Kiefer's abstract works it is not the subject matter that is important but the method of its rendering and the medium, the very process of painting. Kiefer's paintings imitate the process of fragmentation of physical matter through

their formal qualities not only with the purpose to imitate the real world but also to render in painting ancient mythological themes as for example in the painting "Osiris and Isis." According to the interpretation of researcher Erik Hornung "in Egyptian mythology even gods cannot escape death, and this inevitable destiny common to all beings, is described particularly drastically and gravely in the myth about Osiris. The Egyptian god Osiris was not only murdered by his brother Seth, moreover his dead body was fragmented and its parts were thrown into the river Nil. Death by fragmentation overwhelms him before he has time to conceive an heir that would take care of the continuity of the dynasty and of the imperial throne, that is taken over by Seth. Thus there is no question of the ritualised burial or of embalming - the comfort of any deceased who had to do without all these rituals. To all these the myth brings the message that life can be engendered out of death even if all these rituals are not performed.

Faithfulness in spite of death works wonders. Isis supported by arduous assistants gathers the scattered fragments of her brother's and husband's body, supplements the missing limb and takes posthumously care of the offspring, as she conceives Horus from the stiff corpse of Osiris. As a result of this Seth's plan fails, there exists the heir and therefore the succession of power from father to son secured by the law of inheritance cannot be abolished as a result of the forceful interference. Even though Horus as the heir has to prove himself in many cases, his skills and abilities, supported by the trickery and magic powers of Isis, triumph over the crudeness of violent Seth. The divine court in Heliopolis solemnly proclaims: Osiris reigns over the depths, into which he goes down, Horus will be set as the king on earth and is the embodiment of the ruling Pharaoh ...

Because of the inevitable destiny to die any king becomes "Osiris" right away and after death receives this name as the honorary title; following the Old Kingdom step by step other deceased as well received this title, when someone becomes "Osiris" after one's death, he enters the role and the entity of the deity."¹

The body of Osiris split into parts and thrown into the river Nil is rendered by Kiefer in his numerous works dedicated to the theme mostly by formal means: the compositional structure, the method of execution of the work itself. In the painting "Osiris" rectangular pieces of lead sheets are attached to the medial support making up a geometrical abstraction with fractured

¹ Erik Hornung, *Tal der Könige*, p. 177

angular forms, separated and scattered all over the surface. The flat medial surface made up of pieces of lead superimposed upon one another formally corresponds to the fragmented, dismembered body of Osiris, with the disjoint limbs rendered as angular broken forms - parts of the abstraction. The myth of Seth killing Osiris and fragmenting his body is literally rendered in Kiefer's painting via the formal practices of fragmentation of the integrity of an image into an abstraction, breaking the natural order of things and reducing shapes into abstract, reiterating elements scattered all over the medial surface.

In the lead painting "Osiris" based on a photograph the secluded space partially revealed by a heavy lead curtain might remind ancient Egyptian burial chambers, with the difference that the wall paintings are obliterated to the state of non-existence and the gaping emptiness of the abandoned space contains nothing but splinters of broken forms and dried ferns. The depth of the perspective visible behind the curtain in the lower part of the picture refers to the mysterious depths of the underworld into which Osiris submerged, whereas the fragments of the divine forms scattered over the floor allude to the violent death of Osiris. The dramatic content of the Egyptian myth is rendered in the painting by its compositional tension. On the one hand the picture is remarkably flat and abstract with the upper part being a rugged sheet of lead forming the unfolding monochrome surface layer, which is opposed by the photographed inner space below the lead sheet, a rigidly confined foreshortened space leading inside into the depth of a secluded chamber. Thus the picture appears flat and three-dimensional simultaneously, leading the spectator's eye back and forth, with its upper part formally contradicting the lower one. Such composition formally alludes to the rivalry between the myth protagonists: Osiris and violent Seth. The metaphoric chamber in Kiefer's painting contains no images except for lifeless dry ferns attached to the walls. The traditional representations of Osiris on the walls of the burial chambers in ancient Egypt, with the accompanying hieroglyphic texts spelled out the hope of the final resurrection and revealed by means of images the mysteries of the underworld. The mysterious chamber represented by Kiefer beneath the lead curtain conveys no promise and no revelation. It translates the myth into the formal language of painting, verging on abstraction, emphasising death and fragmentation as the destiny of all, whereas redemption and restitution remain questionable and their mysterious essence hidden. *(Pic. 8. Osiris, 1985-1991, 170 x 240 cm, photography on lead in glassed steel frame, Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin)*

The motive of fracture, the shattering into a ruinous state so prominent in Kiefer's works is one of the major themes in Jewish mythology particularly in the texts of Kabbala, the Jewish esoteric mysticism. The books of Kabbala which in translation from Hebraic means tradition, lore were written between the 12th - 17th centuries. The main books of Kabbala are: the Hechalot literature, dating back to the 4th - 10th centuries and containing angelic teachings, Sefer (Hebr. book) Jezira, Bahir and Sohar. These books together with the Merkabamystik actually represent the esoteric and theosophic thought of Judaism. The term Merkabamystik - originates from Merkaba - the heavenly chariot in Ezech. 1.15-28. The texts of the Merkabamystik deal with the divine apparition, epiphany. Merkabamystik, in the Jewish mysticism according to the visions of Ezech. described the heavenly chariot - a sophisticated term indicating both the "maase merkava" - Hebr. work of the chariot and partially the "maase beresit" - Hebr. work of creation. Merkabamystik contains Jewish esoteric thought related to the creation and the heavenly world. The chosen Kabbalists after ascetic preparation were expected to set out to the dangerous trip through the seven heavens, and then through the seven heavenly palaces. In the last one they were supposed to see the God on His throne as the Holy King.

In the 12th -14th centuries in South France (Provence) and in Spain emerged the movements which are actually identified as Kabbala. At this period the book Bahir was created and at the same time the prophetic-messianic aspirations became evident. Between 1240 - 1280 the main book of Kabbala was created - the Book Sohar (the Book of Splendour), which later became the canon text of the Kabbala. In the form of Midrash (Hebr. Biblical exegesis) in this book the teachings of the ten stages of the divine manifestation are explained, whereas the tenth stage is identified with the congregation of Israel and the eternal presence of the divine. The teaching of the transmigration of souls is also an important component of the book.

As a result of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 Kabbala obtains further apocalyptic and messianic depth: the experience of suffering and the anticipation of the evil. In the new center Zefat in Palestina Moses de Cordovero systematised the older teachings of the Kabbala. Isaak Luria created the new philosophical doctrine and the teaching of the "Shattering of the Vessels" (the origin of the anti world of evil).

The book of Sohar - (Hebr. splendour) the main book of Kabbala, dates back to the second

half of the 13th century and was most obviously composed by the Spanish Kabbalist Moses Ben Schem Tov de Leon in Aramaic. Its contents is mainly the mystic meanings of the Thora (Hebr. Bible) and other Biblical books as well as the description of the deeds and doctrines of the Tanaites and the homilies. Sefer Jezira - is the book of creation - a Kabbala text of the 3rd-6th centuries with mystic speculative contents about the process of creation.¹

For Anselm Kiefer who devoted a set of his paintings to the motives from the Kabbala the rendering of themes from esoteric Jewish philosophy in his works is in the first place the restoration by means of art of the missing Jewish component that was eliminated from the realm of the German culture as a result of the Holocaust. Tikkun - the restitution as the final messianic goal mentioned in the Kabbala is for Kiefer thus partially possible by restitution of the missing Jewish aspect to the fractured realm of the German cultural heritage. Secondly the issue of epiphany that is central to Kabbala mysticism plays a significant role in Kiefer's art. Epiphany - self-revelation, apparition, revelation, saliency - are for Kiefer as painter of primary importance. Since for him to paint means to reveal the truth, to depict the hidden unknown realm beneath the transparent palette, to make visible the invisible, to translate from the unspeakable and the unreadable into the visual, from fractured and destroyed into whole. For him painting itself symbolised by the transparent palette enabling one to see through it - is the means of highest revelation - the ideal and the final goal of painting that brings about the artistic restitution, freedom from the feeling of guilt after the tainted fascist heritage of German art, the restitution by means of art that equals the messianic Tikkun of the Kabbala.

The motive of fracture, the shattering into a ruinous state so prominent in Kiefer's works is one of the major themes in Jewish mythology. According to Lurianic Kabbala the vessels that were supposed to contain the God's light were too weak for this task and were shattered. The shattering of the vessels (Shevirat ha-Kelim) was perceived by the Kabbalists as the cosmic catastrophe. Because of the shattering of the vessels everything in the world is imperfect, out of place, ruined and composed of shreds. Eventually it is the task of mankind to bring about the original order termed as restitution (tikkun).

The Kabbala myth however does not determine any definite restitution. Like the whole myth of the divine vessels, the idea of their restoration is an ambiguous metaphor. In Lurianic

¹ Meyers Großes Universallexikon, Vol. 9, p. 286, p.126. Vol. 13, p. 373, Vol. 7, p. 373

Kabbala to which Kiefer's works are related restitution is stated as the absolute ideal, the ultimate goal, metaphorically rendered in the myth but actually beyond achievement, either in art or in real world. The major focus in the myth like in Kiefer's canvases is on the state of ruin, fragmentation and on the efforts that have to be made in search for the restitution, that would reveal the high sacred knowledge. However the divine revelation appears to be a highly metaphoric and mysterious process, hardly attainable and most obviously beneath rational interpretation. One might suppose that the effort itself of the search for this knowledge brings about the redemption. Such metaphoric search by means of art is obvious in Kiefer's works. It constitutes restitution but only partial, since on the canvases everything appears opaque, ambiguous and veiled. The whole artistic endeavour of painting: making visible the invisible, is interpreted by the artist as an attempt to bring about restitution - a failed attempt in fact, since according to Kiefer's canvases the task appears impossible to accomplish. The Heavenly Palaces are beyond our knowledge and beyond our reach both underground or above in the sky, in spite of a heavenly ladder which more confuses than gives direction as in the paintings "Himmelsleiter" (Heavenly Stair) and "Sefer Hechalot" (Pic. 51, 52).

According to the Hechalot mythology the Seven Heavenly Palaces or the Hechalot are the divine palaces each corresponding to a particular stage of ascent through the seven heavenly realms. The ascent is supposed to be a mysterious process of spiritual elevation undertaken by the Kabbalists in the pursuit of beholding the divine and getting an insight into the cosmic mysteries. Such journey was fraught with danger and only the very few selected ones could survive it and reach the final seventh palace containing divine revelation. The Hechalot literature, that emerged after the destruction of the Second Temple - the earthly palace - by the Romans, rendered this tragic historic event as a catastrophe that can never be remedied. Therefore the earthly palace, the Temple, was replaced in the esoteric writings of the Hechalot by the metaphoric celestial palaces, the pilgrimage to which required not physical but spiritual effort and the destruction of which became physically impossible.

Kiefer's painting "Sieben Himmelspaläste" (Seven Heavenly Palaces) is formally and compositionally similar to the painting "Osiris" (Pic. 8). Here as well an abstract lead curtain in the upper part of the painting falls over the lower part of the picture containing figurative motives, a road leading to the divine palaces. Yet the curtain hides more than it reveals, making the palaces seem as mysterious and unavailable as ever. Like in the "Osiris" painting

the tension of the mythological content is rendered through the formal and compositional means. The upper abstract part of the painting - the monochrome grey layer of rugged lead sheets contradicts the lower figurative part, which represents a photograph of a paved road disappearing in the perspective with gaping dark holes. The depth of the perspective counterpointed with the pronounced abstract flatness of the lead curtain above formally renders the contradictory essence of the Hechalot literature that promises esoteric ascent and revelation of the divine mysteries and on the other hand renders this endeavour scarcely possible, hardly feasible and fraught with danger. The visual contradiction of the lower figurative part of the painting to the upper flat and abstract one makes obvious the incompatibility of the heavenly aspect to the earthly aspect, the opposition of the upper realm to the lower one.

The "Seven Heavenly Palaces" is based on a photo. Like in the painting "Unfolding of Sefirot" a curtain-like layer of lead is folded up, uncovering the obscure, elaborately worked medial surface. What appears to be a painting coincides with a photograph mounted on the medial support, leaving the spectator confused about its origin. The superimposition of various layers of matter corresponds in Kiefer's works to the superimposition of various layers of meaning related to his work, which makes the final meaning hidden, mysterious and inaccessible like the inaccessible "Heavenly Palaces." In the painting the "Palaces" are actually seven black holes dug into an abandoned paved road. They relate both to the emptiness actually left after the physical destruction of the Second Temple, from which only holes might have remained in the ground, as well as metaphorically to the esoteric palaces that are hidden from the eye of the uninitiated spectator. One is offered a chance to glimpse deep down the holes or beneath the lead curtain, to observe the medial surface. Kiefer alludes to revealing the dark sub-medial inner space beneath the canvas surface when he depicts the dark holes leading into the inner space under the paved road. The gaping dark holes as well as the paved road disappearing in the perspective appear to lead both beyond the picture plane into the unknown illusory inner space beneath the medial surface of the painting, as well as down into the underground space under the surface of the land, where the mysterious "palaces" are supposedly located. On the other hand the flat layer of lead denies this access and formally contradicts the movement inside. The sub-medial space, illusory or not, remains invisible for the spectator's eye, it is closed and unavailable, the same way as the inner nature of representation or the inner spaces of the "Heavenly Palaces." (*Pic. 9. Sieben*

Himmelspaläste /Seven Heavenly Palaces/, 1991, 170 x 240 cm, photo on lead in glassed steel frame, Collection Michel Roche, Paris)

In Kiefer's painting "Sol Invictus" the world is represented as a swarm of black dots - black sunflower seeds attached to an opaque light background and a body lying under a huge sunflower. "Sol Invictus" the invincible sun, as the title indicates, is related to the sun-god venerated in the late Roman Empire. In imperial Rome it was the Emperor himself who was identified with the sun-god. Sol Invictus was generally represented on state coins, as a statue or a relief wearing a radiated solar crown, in some representations naked or with a cloak, riding a Quadriga with a whip in his hand. Very often Roman emperors represented themselves as Sol-Invictus. According to some sources the divinity is originally related to the god Baal and to the cult of Mitra. Sol-Invictus or Sol Elagabal was an oriental deity from Emesa in Syria. Initially it was Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus who named himself Heliogabalus or Elagabalus upon his entry in Rome.¹

In Kiefer's work the "invincible-sun" is blackened out, it is compared to the dead sunflowers that are faded out. The invincibility of the sun, irrevocably related to imperial power, is questioned. The unconquered sun, like the dried sunflowers, is supposed to be vanquished in the course of time. The cult of the sun-god symbolised by a dead sunflower is represented temporary, transient like vegetation on earth that periodically blooms and fades away following the eternal laws of nature.

The dead body represented at the foot of the sun-flower is an image of the painter himself composed of thousands of black sunflower-seeds. It is not the traditional representation of a Roman Emperor identifying himself with the sun-god. The image is not crowned with sun rays or riding an imperial Quadriga as the Roman tradition had it. In Kiefer's interpretation it is a self-portrait of a contemporary painter identifying himself with Sol-Invictus.

In his earlier watercolour related to Sol Invictus Kiefer represented the sun-god "...with the traits of Ludwig II. of Bavaria. 'Sol Invictus Helah-Gabal' looks like a beautiful Wehrmacht youth of the Second World War. Red stains are cast over the sheet like blood smeared bullet holes. (The 'Victory over the Sun', the famous 'opera' by Alexei Krutshonich, Matyushin and Malevich, 1913, could well have been conceived as a symbolist-futurist counter-piece to the

¹ Helios und Sol, Petra Matern, pp. 219

traditional 'Sol Invictus')".¹

Kiefer's paintings related to Sol Invictus pose questions on the relationships of arts and politics historically: is the power invested with an artist comparable to that of an emperor? Is representation the means of glorification of this power? Does the image of a dead painter imply the death of art, the death of representation or the death of the long tradition of representation serving ideological purposes? How are all these aspects: of politics, of power and of representation interrelated? It is as if the painting invites its spectators to analyse the iconoclastic aspects of art, as well as the whole history of relationship of power and the policies of representation.

The paintings dedicated to the themes from Jewish mythology render their subject in the formal vocabulary of shapes and forms on the picture surface. In his interpretation of motives from Jewish mysticism Anselm Kiefer is influenced by the Hechalot literature and by the teachings of Kabbalist Isaac Luria, a Jewish mystic who lived and taught in the 16th century in the Galilee. The Hechalot literature is composed of early Jewish esoteric texts, that were written after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C. E. These esoteric writings deal with the mystic ascents into the celestial realms by means of the heavenly chariot Merkaba, they also contain accounts of the angelic and divine visions, descriptions of the seven heavens and of the seven celestial palaces. According to these sources Sefiroth are mysterious divine emanations that make up the symbolic tree of life, each branch of which corresponds to each of the ten Sephirot. They form the foundation of the worlds, contain hidden knowledge and the divine light, therefore the process of unfolding of the Sefiroth would mean revelation about the nature of the world as well as about the nature of the divine. For Anselm Kiefer painting corresponds to the process of unfolding of Sephirot and he thus turns art into a means for achieving revelation. His painting "Unfolding of Sefirot" represents rugged lead sheets folded up over the picture surface as if revealing it to the spectator by taking off the cover. This abstract picture analyses the medium of painting in an attempt to reveal its inner core by means of laying bare the traces left by the artist on the surface beneath the upper layer of lead. The roughly worked uneven picture surface traditionally hidden beneath representational image appears here gradually unfolding behind the rough lead sheets with a seal above. The process of unfolding the inner core of the painterly medium is related to the process of unfolding the "Sefirot", the mysterious media of divine power. For Kiefer painting is a form

¹ Jürgen Harten, Renata Sharp, Anselm Kiefer, State Art Gallery, Dusseldorf, pp. 39-40

of divine revelation. He thematises it attempting to reveal its inner nature, which is as complicated, pure and mysterious as the nature of "Sefirot."

The large-scale painting "Jerusalem" is a non-figurative abstraction with a pair of skis attached to the surface. The city is rendered as a tortured body, bearing scars left by the artist on the medial surface. The way Kiefer handles the subject reveals the tormented history of the city which implies both mythological Biblical and historical aspects. The view of the city is rendered by the painter as a suffered, violated space. The traces of violence left by the artist on the medial support indicate the aspect of martyrdom. The violent treatment of the "body" of the picture is related to the violence implied in history. The painting "Jerusalem" was created by adding paint to a giant landscape photograph of the city, and then covering parts of the image with molten lead and more paint. Later much of the lead and the second layer of colour was brutally peeled off leaving a scarred and twisted inner surface to which cast iron skis are attached. The violent history of "Jerusalem" is rendered here in the very way the painting was created. The tortured, scarred surface of the painting can be associated with the history of wars, destruction, ruin. The divided, multi-layered surface with masses of colour pigment and matter attached to it: steel, lead, gold leaf, acrylic, emulsion and shellac on canvass, make up the complicated, abused surface that in its structure reflects the whole complexity of mythological, biblical and historical contexts related to Jerusalem. The painting's unity is disintegrated - the picture is composed of two identical rectangular parts with skis attached to each of them. The flatness of the painting, its two-dimensionality emphasised by attached objects and the thick layers of pigment mounted on canvass emphasise the medial support by attempting to strip it from any image in order to reveal its inner core. Kiefer's violent way of treating the canvass is a purposeful means to render the holy land of Jerusalem as the topography of torture. The skis - a pair of ready-made objects attached to the picture surface - also stress the flatness of the painting. The skis imply movement both forwards and upwards. The ambiguous ascent implied by the skis render Jerusalem as a cite of spiritual ascent possible as the result of physical suffering. Yet the place also is rendered as a terrain of permanent stagnation, since the skis although imply movement are hopelessly stuck to the picture surface. They cast ominous shadows which convey stagnation rather than dynamic motion, thus ironically questioning any ascent or movement.

(Pic. 10. Jerusalem, 1984-1986, 380 x 560 cm, acrylic, emulsion, shellac, lead, skis and gold

leaf on canvas, in two parts, with steal and lead, Collection of Susan and Lewis Manilow, Chicago)

Chapter II

Landscapes

Tabula rasa

"Groß

geht der verbrannte dort oben, der
Verbrannte: ein Pommer, zuhause
im Maikäferlied, das mütterlich blieb, sommerlich hell-
blütig am Rand
aller schroffen,
winterhart-kalten
*Silben."*¹

„We have seen that his (Kiefer's) approach to landscape painting is also deeply considered, in fact, he wants in some sense to do away with it. But his focus on the blackened landscape ought to be compared to Cezanne's emphasis on Mont Saint Victoire, for each artist employs a landscape subject to express profound feelings.“² It is not incidental that analysing Kiefer's landscapes Mark Rosenthal compares them to those of Cezanne. Kiefer's landscapes, like his art in general, continue the tradition of modernism in art, whereas mentioning of Cezanne, one of the most prominent representatives of modernism, characterises Kiefer as an artist who reinterpreted modernist painting in his works. In some of his landscapes Kiefer cancels the traditional illusion of depth in representation replacing it with two-dimensional picture plane. He puts greater emphasis on surface texture and tactile qualities drawing attention to the medium of painting within the landscape of German history. Kiefer reduces most of his landscapes to painted or at times photographed images of scorched earth, with thick layers of paint, straw, wood, or lead objects attached to the medial support. He thus emphasises the flatness of the picture surface by introducing abstract, monotonous motives that are scattered all over the picture plane and break up its original integrity. German landscape reduced to the black square of scorched earth, or a landscape engulfed within the contours of a transparent palette painted over it thematises it within the horizon of German cultural tradition,

¹ Paul Celan, *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, p. 97

² Mark Rosenthal, *Anselm Kiefer*, p.155

emphasising the medium itself and its perspectives for the future against the background of the history of fascism. "With their high horizons, before which extends nothing more than deserted, devastated or burnt land, these 'landscapes' contradict the great German tradition of landscape painting, appropriated by the National-Socialists, in order to create the embodiment of 'German seeing', the self-portrait of the German soul, representing its organic spiritual change."¹

Landscapes in Kiefer's paintings are subject to extreme reduction. They have a tendency towards abstraction. Rough brushwork with thick layers of paint and burnt soil attached to the canvas emphasise the surface of the medial support. Mimetic representation is in greater part of such landscapes cancelled or of secondary importance. If German land was actually reduced to ashes in the war, its pictorial representation in Kiefer's works is radically reduced to a roughly textured dark abstraction that reminds Malevich's "Black Square." The land divided into the lines of furrows appears like "tabula rasa," an empty space. In these paintings Kiefer analyses the artistic medium, the empty dark canvass covered with paint and organic matter. Such violent, barbaric method of handling a painting: burning, cutting up, attaching lumps of soil, straw, peeling certain layers off from the canvass surface, rejecting conventional methods of mimetic representation is purposefully implemented by the artist, since these unconventional, brutal methods of creating a painting imitate the barbarism of history. The abstract emptiness conveyed by these landscapes brings to mind the emptiness of the devastated territories left as a result of the scorched earth policy implemented by the fascist troops during the Second World War. "Verbrannte Erde"- scorched earth which is piece by piece applied to some of Kiefer's landscapes e.g. in the painting "Maikäfer flieg!" literally relates to the so-called scorched earth policy - a policy that involves destroying anything that might be useful to the enemy while advancing through or withdrawing from an area. This military strategy was widely implemented by the Nazis in the occupied territories during the World War II. In fact the scorched earth policy has a long history. In ancient times it was implemented by Scythians against King Darius the Great of Persia. It was also used by the Romans after the end of the Second Punic War in 146 BC, in order to permanently destroy the Carthage as a result of which the city buildings were torn down, their stones scattered, so

¹ "Mit ihrer hohen Horizontlinie, vor der nichts anderes als eine öde, zerstörte oder verbrannte Erde liegt, widersprechen diese 'Landschaften' der großen Deutschen Tradition der Landschaftsmalerei, die sich die Nationalsozialisten angeeignet hatten um aus ihr den Inbegriff eines 'Deutschen Sehens', das Selbstbildnis der deutschen Seele, eine organische Veränderung ihres Genies zu machen," Daniel Arasse, Anselm Kiefer, p.

that not even rubble remained and the fields were burnt. In 1812 during the Napoleonic war Czar Alexander I implemented the scorched earth policy while retreating. As Russian forces withdrew they burnt the countryside over which they passed leaving nothing of value for Napoleon's army. The French troops arrived into virtually abandoned Moscow suffering final defeat. Due to the scorched earth policy both the invaders as well as the civilian population of the areas where it is applied are subject to suffering, hunger and heavy casualties. Thus the scorched earth landscapes represented by Kiefer in his paintings invoke both the memories of destruction implemented by the Nazis as well as the persistent image of war-ravaged land, reiterating throughout history.

The painting "Maikäfer flieg!" (Cockchafer Fly!) thematically continues the topic of the scorched earth paintings. The greater portion of the picture is abstract. The rough uneven texture of its surface is made up of layers of paint and burnt lumps of earth applied to the canvass. The main attention is drawn here onto the rough fabric of the painting, the saturated black colour, the uneven, smeared with pigment and organic matter medial surface that contains no mimetic representation. The rectangular form of the canvass is reiterated and thus emphasised by the horizontal lines in which earth and paint are applied to the canvass. The horizon line, that appears above, is very thin, it contains an inscription - a citation from a children's song "Maikäfer flieg!" and what appears as a forest on a mountainous hill dwarfed in the distance. The inscription and the trees are painted very inconspicuous as compared to the rough thick masses of pigment and soil, making up the picture's lower portion. In spite of the illusion of a perspective engendered by the trees dwarfed in the distance, the painting appears flat and two-dimensional. The citation from the children's song inscribed at the borderline between the earth and the sky intensifies the perception of the painting as a flat, two-dimensional surface. The quote runs: "Maikäfer flieg / der Vater ist im Krieg / die Mutter ist im Pommerland / Pommerland ist abgebrannt!"¹ The brutality implied in the rough surface of the painting imitates the violent language of the children's song handwritten across the canvass, which in turn echoes the brutal handwriting of history. Language functions here as part of the landscape of collective memory where historical events are encoded. The thick dark abstract emptiness of the lower part of the painting reveals the dark medial surface free from mimetic representation that can be compared to the dark collective subconscious. (*Pic. 11. Maikäfer flieg! 1974, 220 x 300 cm, oil on burlap, inscription up on the left: "Maikäfer flieg! der Vater ist im Krieg, die Mutter ist in Pommerland, Pommerland ist abgebrannt;"*

¹ Cockchafer Fly, Father is in the war, Mother is in Pommern, Pommern is burnt up!

Collection Doris and Charles Saatchi, London)

Likewise in the landscapes "Nero Paints," "To Paint=To Burn," "To Paint" made in the 70-ies the spectator's attention is drawn in the first place to the colour of dark burnt earth that fills up the greater part of the picture surface. In "Nero Paints" the landscape is rendered schematically. It is divided into two parts: the lower abstract portion and the upper narrow portion with trees against the sky. The furrows of the earth divide the picture plane in the lower part of the painting into orderly measured segments - motives of the scorched earth in a field. The straight lines converging in the distance create the illusion of a perspective receding in the depth. On the other hand the painting's flatness is emphasised by its rough surface with a thick layer of pigment applied to the canvas and a red palette with brushes that is painted over the landscape. Kiefer makes here a more close up view of the earth, with the rounded palette functioning like the medium within the medium. Its transparency allows one to see through the surface layer, it seems as if one is enabled to look into the inner hidden realm beyond the surface. The spectator can simultaneously observe depths of the illusory perspective counterpointed with the painting's pronounced flat, built up surface. The opposition between the two modes of representation: mimetic and abstract corresponds to the double nature of painting: its violent aspect, as suggested by mentioning in the title of Emperor Nero, notorious for his brutality, and on the other hand - painting analysed within its intrinsic formalist and structuralist aspects, as a medium in itself, with attention to its institutional framing, as well as the analysis of the complicated relationship between art and power, art and politics throughout history. In this case painting is subject to no other criteria except for those of formal and stylistic character, that have been maintained and modified throughout centuries within a single artistic tradition, thus emphatically emphasised by the unchangeable symbol of painting - the palette with brushes imposed over the landscape. If mimetic representation in painting has a tainted history of serving violent dictatorships from Emperor Nero's regime till fascism, the non-figurative, abstract painting proclaimed by avant-garde, frees this medium of its tainted history and returns it into purely artistic discourse at the cost of the radical reduction of conventional painting to abstraction emphasising the medium and the formal aspects of representation.

In the works "To Paint=To Burn" (1974) and "To Paint" (1974) abstract and mimetic representation are combined although the abstraction that makes up the lower part of the

paintings, is more conspicuous. Gestural application of pigment makes up a rough uneven surface of the picture, masses of pigment mixed with other substances blur, disperse and overlap instead of indicating distinct forms, colour is applied in broken, discontinuous rhythms, the thickness of the canvas with the mass of pigment on it is not the same all over the surface, the colours are not equally saturated and do not have the same intensity in different parts of the painting, traces of brush, spatula or bodily imprints are evident. The contours of a painter's palette schematically painted over the landscape as well as the inscriptions made by the artist on the canvass emphasise the two-dimensionality, the flatness of the painting the way avant-garde artists did. In fact the transparent palette appears like an artificial eye offering the spectator a view into the essence of painting, into the dark sub-medial depths beneath the surface. Kiefer thematises here not so much the landscape but rather the medium of his craft, the rough fabric of the canvass, the surface freed from mimetic representation. It is an attempt to reveal the inner core of painting, its irreducible aspects, Kiefer makes painting itself his subject analysing it, imitating and exposing the different phases of making a picture. In representing his landscapes as abstractions he attempts to purify painting from ideological, historical, political contexts and to draw attention to the subject of painting itself: the form of the canvass, the medial surface, the picture plane, the material attached to the canvass: pigment, straw, shellac, acrylic, soil, lead, organic substances. This analysis of art within artistic context is symbolised by the painter's transparent palette that appears imposed over the landscape. The tradition of landscape representation is analysed within the horizon of German painting with evocations of Caspar David Friedrich, as well as within the context of international avant-garde heritage. *(Pic. 12. To Paint, 118 x 254 cm, oil, shellac on burlap, inscription vertically in the middle "malen" and below to the right "for Julia", Collection of family H. de Groot, Groningen)*

In certain landscapes made by Kiefer painting is getting closer to non-painting. Lead objects attached to the picture surface make it appear more as a relief rendered in an austere modernist tradition, with a schematically represented background. For example in the piece entitled „The Book“ (330 x 555 cm) made in 1979-1985 the strict, angular form of a huge lead book (130 x 218 ½ cm) dominates a deserted landscape with a high horizon. The rectangular form of the canvas is replicated by the rectangular outlines of the lead book which appears like a primary pure form attached to the painting's surface. The picture plane is defined by the interrelated geometric forms and lines. Kiefer analyses here the medium of the

book attached to an abstract medial surface of the painting. The artist creates the effect of "medial sincerity" allowing the spectator to face the pure medial surface of a lead book freed from any text against the background of an abstract landscape. It is an attempt to reveal the inner core of the two media: the book and the painting, to compare the two forms of representation of reality: reading/writing and painting. The integrity of the painting, as well as the illusion of the perspective is broken by the straight lines that divide the picture plane into segments, whereas the rectangular lead book object attached to the surface emphasises its flatness. The word contained in the book and painting emerge as two ways of representing the world. The book as the divine, heavenly aspect occupies a central position in the composition.

Other landscapes with objects attached to the surface appear as reliefs or sculptural paintings. In the works "For Khlebnikov" or "The Order of Angels" both made in the 80-ies various media are mixed. Kiefer works here at the borderline between painting and sculpture. The rectangular and circular shapes: lead books, rocks or air plane propellers hung up or attached to the monochrome schematically rendered landscape backgrounds appear as examples of sculptural painting. These pictures are two-dimensional and flat. The attached objects articulate the palpable, tactile aspects of the work. They emphasise gravity and mass, like the works of avant-garde artists Naum Gabo and Antoin Pevsner, who experimented with constructivist sculptural paintings.

In the "The Hierarchy of Angels" (133 1/2 x 220 7/8 cm) lead rocks are hung up to an air plane propeller attached to the canvass. The rocks hang on steel cables arranged in a certain "hierarchical" order. Kiefer stresses here the gravity and mass of the heavy lead objects against the background of a landscape. The whole canvas surface is rough, uneven filled up to the edges with layers of pigment. The artist stresses the borderline between art and non-art. Like in the installations of Dada and Duchamp the spectator sees ready-made objects that are borrowed from the profane world and brought into artistic context: repetitive motive of the spheric lead rocks, the dysfunctional air plane propeller and straight lines of the steel cords make up an ensemble of forms and shapes defined against the abstract background. The subject matter of the painting is rendered here via the formal qualities: the shifting of the contexts, the placement of objects, the changes in the traditional "hierarchy" of concepts. The title of the painting is taken from the fifth century text attributed to Dionisus Areopagita "The

Celestial Hierarchy," according to which angels were divided into nine categories, all navigating between heaven and earth. It was Dionisus's concept of heaven as a vast spiral in which time and space move in all directions.¹ Anselm Kiefer in his unconventional quasi-constructivist sculptural painting analyses the relativity of the concept of "hierarchy" of art, for example, versus non-art, painting versus sculpture, abstraction versus mimetic representation.

In the sculptural painting "For Khlebnikov" a spheric lead rock is hung up to the monochrome background of a schematically rendered landscape. This time the work is dedicated to a Russian futurist poet Velimir Khlebnikov who was obsessed with mathematics and attempted to predict the dates of wars in future by means of numerological calculations. It is noteworthy that Kiefer pays an homage to a futurist poet who experimented with language and numbers in the epoch of classic modernism. Velimir Khlebnikov attempted to reveal the hidden mechanism of historical development and render it in the coded medium of numerical formulas, whereas Anselm Kiefer, who continues the traditions of avant-garde in his art focuses on thematising history of his medium of painting against the background of German history.

In Kiefer's "Landscape with Head" made in 1973 (210 x 240 cm, charcoal, oil on burlap; with black distemper /Leimfarbe/, left part glued to burlap, charcoal drawing, burlap seamed together horizontally, the right side cut off) the artist emphasises the form of the medial support, that is arranged out of different kinds of materials arbitrarily glued together, on which images are rendered in different techniques. The charcoal drawing of the viewer's head is glued to the landscape executed in oil on burlap. The evident difference between the modes of execution of the two different parts of the painting: the different textures - oil on burlap on one side and charcoal on paper on the other, glued together with pattex stress the incompatibility of the two sides of the painting - the two worlds that do not belong together - that of the viewer and that of the viewed. Although these two are included into a fake, painted frame and two red rays of vision protrude from the viewer to the viewed, the difference in the materials and techniques of execution creates a disparity and disjunction between the two. One is a portrait, the other is a landscape and the two are put together arbitrarily. This painting thematises the impossibility to see, the gap of misunderstanding, between the spectator and

¹ Michael Auping, Anselm Kiefer, Heaven and Earth, p. 88

what is seen, in spite of the actual act of seeing. For the viewer who does not belong in the landscape, it will always remain an incomprehensible, void, dark space, the empty medial surface which remains inaccessible for seeing or understanding. The head and the landscape are set vis-à-vis. Turned at ninety degrees from viewer's line of vision the relation of the human being to the landscape is observed from the side.¹ (*Pic. 13. Landscape with Head, 1973, 210 x 240 cm, charcoal, oil on burlap; with black distemper /Leimfarbe/, on the left a charcoal drawing glued with pattex; burlap seamed together horizontally, the right edge unevenly cut off, private collection*). Kiefer's this early picture that innovatively interprets the traditional motive of a landscape and its spectator introduces a long set of works dedicated to the theme of German landscape that the artist repeatedly analysed in his further works.

The Ashen Landscapes

The straw covered landscape of Nuremberg - the town to which Richard Wagner dedicated his opera "The Mastersingers of Nuremberg" articulates the bond between the German soil and the national culture. Painting „Nuremberg“ 1982, worked on with blow-torch and hatch, with three charred wood battens attached to the canvas, and the inscription „Nuremberg - Festspiel - Wiese“ /Nuremberg - Festival - Field/ is related to Wagner's opera as gesamtkunstwerk, to "Mastersingers of Nuremberg" among others. The mentioning of "Festspiel" (festival) in the inscription alludes to the annual Bayreuth Festival initiated by the composer. The Bayreuth Festival that first took place in 1876 in a specially constructed Festival House designed by architect Gottfried Semper was one of the cultural highlights of the epoch. The first Festival was attended by nobilities including King Ludwig II, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, composers: Franz Liszt, Anton Bruckner, Peter Tchaikovsky and others. The Bayreuth Festival House as Gesamtkunstwerk was conceived by Wagner for the performance of his epic opera cycle "Der Ring des Nibelungen" (The Ring of the Nibelungs).

Nuremberg, one of the oldest German cities, once the center of the German Renaissance, was turned by the Nazis into the cite of huge party conventions - the Nuremberg rallies that tainted and effaced the cultural heritage of the city the way layers of applied matter efface the outlines of the cityscape in Kiefer's painting. The city was subsequently turned into a desert both in cultural terms since all progressive cultural movements of the time were persecuted by the Nazi regime and later literally as a result of the severe bombings by the allied forces

¹ Jürgen Harten, Renata Sharp, Anselm Kiefer, p. 37

during the Second World War. The city is also famous for the notorious Nuremberg Trials over the German officials who were involved in the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity.

In Kiefer's painting Nuremberg is depicted as a deserted meadow "Wiese" turned into wilderness with patches of straw glued to the medial support. This is no longer the site where the Mastersingers have to perform according to the plot of Wagner's opera but the site that fell victim to ideology and was distorted by war. "The Mastersingers of Nuremberg" is one of the few Wagner's operas that is dedicated to the theme of art - music, and the artist - composer, singer, the same way as Kiefer's work is about painter and painting. The opera touches upon the fundamental subject of the role of art and artist, the so-called "Mastersinger" in society and in history. The "Mastersingers" are the chosen ones, the artists. Kiefer as an artist, a painter, respectively analyses his role within the scope of German history and cultural tradition.

According to the opera plot the Mastersingers were supposed to enter a song-contest and the winner was entitled to marry Eva the daughter of a wealthy goldsmith and the Mastersinger Veit Pogner. Although in the opera music as the highest of all arts turns Nuremberg into a city of rich musical traditions, the celebrated venue of the contest enabling the Mastersinger Walther to win the loved of Eva, in Kiefer's picture art is rendered as mournful, inadequate, unable to change the brutal course of history that turned Nuremberg into a deserted wilderness. The abstraction of music corresponds in this picture to the abstraction in painting that renders the contest grounds as a piece of scorched earth, an abandoned "Wiese" (meadow) without the Mastersingers. Nuremberg and the Festival indicate the Germany's outstanding cultural and musical tradition related to Wagner which became contaminated by Nazi ideology. Nuremberg is rendered as a flat abstract picture with patches of straw, half burnt wood and a thick layer of oil applied to the medial support forming a repetitive motive, scattered all over the picture plane. Furrows of land recessing in the perspective form a separate picture plane beneath the layer of straw attached to the surface. This painted layer beneath the surface indicates the depth of the perspective hidden under the rough surface. The straw attached to the flat rectangular picture surface is the main element of the abstract painting. Actually by covering the painting's surface with straw Kiefer re-enacts the process of turning into waste land, simultaneously revealing the process of making his artwork: the

procedure of attaching straw onto canvass. The allusion to „the festival" makes the spectator interpret the landscape of Nuremberg as a theatrical setting, thematising the events of the past as a spectacle. The theatre of war merges with the theatrical world of Wagner's opera.

The two paintings "Mastersingers" made by Kiefer in the 80-ies are also abstractions. In one of them colourful patches of pigment make up the fabric of the flat picture, the other one is composed of patches of straw forming poles, attached to the canvas. The patches of colour as well as the poles of straw on canvass are numbered. These components of the painting are scattered all over the picture plane, they are integrated into the overall composition of the work creating a broken rhythm. The recurring motives of colour patches and of straw make up a uniform surface of an abstract painting that thematises the topic of art in a reductionist mode, by means of colour and matter attached to the medial support. "Mastersingers" are symbolically reduced in the painting to numbered pigments of colour and patches of straw against the rough fabric of the canvass. There is no attempt to glorify the "Mastersingers" or attach any particular heroic status to them, contrary to the way Wagner rendered his protagonists in the opera. All "Mastersingers" in Kiefer's work are similar recurrent motives that altogether make up a complex surface texture of the painting, verging on the visual dissonance rather than unity. Kiefer does not single out any of the them, but treats them as a group of uniform elements. (*Pic. 14. Nuremberg, 1982, 280 x 380 cm, acrylic, emulsion and straw on canvas, Collection Eli and Edythe L. Broad, Los Angeles*)

The motive of numbered colour patches in "The Mastersingers", 1981/82 also conveys dissonance in music. Kiefer questions here visual dissonance compared to dissonance in music. Music is nearest to the spoken word. Speech, supposedly originated from music, replacing the initial melody of the tune and of poetry with the dissonance of prose. Like speech, music is not confined within the limits of physicality. Wagner's operas, including the "Mastersingers of Nuremberg" became the inspiration of the fascist regime. Based on Germanic mythology they were the weapon of National-Socialist propaganda. By rendering mastersingers of Nuremberg in painting Kiefer questions, if after all the unspeakable crimes committed by the NS dictatorship, the music along with the respective mythologies, that have been an emblem of a murderous regime can still be redeemed by art. "You don't have to be spiritual to get in touch with spirituality ... There are many artists who run into trouble on their way to paradise, philosophers also: Marx, Hegel, Mao, Wagner. They have all looked for

ways to find their place, their salvation, through philosophy, art or religion."¹

Kiefer's understanding of the role of art and artist is different from that of Wagner. His standpoint is represented in the way Kiefer handles the painting's subject as an abstraction, which does not single out any particular individual mimetically but rather focuses on the artistic medium itself: on the recurrent motives and interrelated shapes, colours, substances on the flat rectangular canvas, the rough texture of the painting as in "The Mastersingers." By concentrating on purely artistic, painterly procedures of arranging colours, shapes, motives and substances upon the medial surface, Kiefer frees art from the task of serving ideologies and returns artistic practice to the formal and stylistic discourse. This attitude makes up the critical content of Kiefer's works. He is ironic about art that is desecrated by being in service of tasks other than purely artistic, as for example Wagner's art. He admires Wagner but not because his music was intended to influence masses for ideological purposes. For Wagner an artist - "the mastersinger" was a revolutionary hero who would lead masses. Such a mission for art is for Kiefer unacceptable. If Wagner wrote his music to serve the cause of revolution, it turned so in the course of history that his work was used to serve much worse purposes than he originally intended to.² In his "Mastersingers" Wagner portrayed the exemplary image of an artist, a hero, the image that was appropriated by the Nazis for the purposes of fascist ideology. The NS regime was famous for its ambitious theatricality intended for the masses. Wagner's music and theatricality served the ideological purposes, a tainted heritage which Kiefer analyses in his paintings.

For Wagner Nuremberg - the city that symbolises the whole Germany - is a theatrical festival stage for his epic operas. He turned Nuremberg into a cite for the festivals celebrating his art that had to produce the revolutionary artist, "the mastersinger," who would transform Germany. Kiefer is sceptical about the revolutionary role of an artist in society, except for the only possible revolution that an artist can cause - the revolutionising of art itself.

The straw motive dominating in "The Mastersingers" reappears in the painting "Your Golden Hair Margarete," 1981. "Around 1980 with the first of the continuing succession of paintings on 'Margarete' and 'Shulamite', Kiefer sets out on the difficult endeavour of associating this

¹ Anselm Kiefer in the interview with Michael Auping in Anselm Kiefer, Heaven and Earth, p. 169

² After participating in the "Dresdner Maiaufstand" (the Dresden May revolt) in 1849 Wagner created a work "Die Kunst und die Revolution" (Art and Revolution) in which he proclaimed revolutionary renewal of society that has to be inspired by art, that would transform people and culture

pair of metaphors from Paul Celan's 'Fugue of Death' with his personal imagery. '... Death is a master from Germany / your golden hair Margarete / your ashen hair Shulamite': in Kiefer the quotation from Celan becomes a many-faceted simile for growth and decay, for agrarian and urban culture..."¹

As Lisa Saltzman pointed out the head painted in the watercolour "Winter Landscape" with blood spilling over the white snow, is the image of the beheaded Sulamith that appears over the landscape. The bloodstained winter landscape covered with snow conveys anguish caused by physical pain as well as by the memories of the Holocaust. The facial features of Sulamith merge with those of Kiefer himself. In the painting "Your Golden Hair Margarete," Sulamith is rendered as a fragment of a citation, corresponding to a fragmentary black curve over the straw symbolising Margarete's body.² In this landscape the spectator can distinguish two picture planes: the static straw-covered surface with the inscribed quotation from Celan's "Todesfuge" (Fugue of Death), counterpointed with the second plane beneath: a void landscape dynamically recessing in the illusory perspective. These two picture planes correspond to two aspects of womanhood: Sulamith and Margarete, the materially present versus the immaterial and the absent. Both components superimposed upon one another make up a complicated fabric of the painting that draws its tension from the contradictory, superimposed layers of matter corresponding to German mythological symbols and historical events. In the painting „Margarete“ 1981, fire flickers on top of straw patches on canvas. This fire is not that of celebration but of commemoration of the missing Sulamith, who after Paul Celan's poem "Death Fugue" represents Jewish womanhood, the Jews, who perished in the Holocaust. „The straw works of 1982-1982 became vehicles for thoroughly German themes, including Nuremberg, the Mastersingers, Midsummer Night, Margarete and Sulamith ... both Margarete and Sulamith have luxuriant cascades of hair. Sulamith's black hair is usually painted, Margarete's locks are described with straw.“³ The two components of Kiefer's landscape: Sulamith with the „ash hair“ and Margarete with the „gold hair“ as in Celan's poem turn the apparently thriving provinces of Germany into topographies of terror and mourning. The golden colour of straw is accompanied in the paintings with a dark lining signifying Sulamith. In „Your Golden Hair, Margarete,“ 1981, straw symbolising Margarete

¹ Anselm Kiefer, Catalogue for the exhibition at the State Art Gallery, Dusseldorf, Jürgen Harten, Renata Sharp, p.130

² Dein Goldenes Haar Margarete, (the strophe further runs "your ashen hair Sulamith" (dein Aschenes Haar Sulamite) although it is not inscribed on the canvass

³ Mark Rosenthal, Anselm Kiefer, pp. 94-95

represents the fertility of the rural landscapes, the emphasis on natural simplicity, pagan rituals and rustic ambience. Without Sulamith's dark shadow these landscapes would seem peaceful and innocent. Yet it is the association with Celan's poem that casts the dark and traumatic shadow of grief onto these rural views. In the painting „Your Golden Hair, Margarete“ the landscape has an extremely high horizon line, it recedes deep in the perspective. There is an impression of farm land with houses in the distance. Combining Celan's poetic language with the representation of the German landscape Kiefer attempts to speak the unspeakable of pain and of violent death. In the painting the palpable materiality of straw is accompanied with the dark brushstrokes accentuating the immateriality of its black shadows. Sulamith's dark aspect as the sign of mourning, is emphasised by the inscription in black. Kiefer specially creates the opposition of the material presence of straw on the painted surface against the abstract immateriality of language indicating the name of Sulamith. This intensifies the incompatibility of the peaceful rural landscape with the shadows of terror and death. The lines from Celan's "Death Fugue" inscribed on the painting's surface imitate the brutal handwriting of history imprinted in memory and on the land. To a certain extent the attempt to express the mourning in language by writing is an attempt to overpower death by remembrance. In his body of work Kiefer persists with mourning over the shadows of the past. As the artist renders his grief in written words, death seems to loosen its power over its victims. Side by side with painting, language offers an opportunity of communication by means of word. Thus painting - the earthly aspect and word - the divine aspect are combined. By rendering mourning in patterns of handwriting over the canvas surfaces Kiefer breaks the silence about the death of the Holocaust victims, because writing always suggests reading and speech.

The silence of death is thus broken, mourning is communicated in language and in image. Words fill out the emptiness of the deserted, ashen landscapes and commemorate the absent. The words dedicated to Sulamith are the words of ash: "You said that this word of ash could not be given any expression 'today.' Yet maybe there is one, which would be reasonable to make public, it would express in German the all consuming fire, otherwise the Holocaust and the crematoria ovens, from all Jewish languages of the world."¹

¹ "Du sagtest gerade, daß es für dieses Wort aus Asche keine Redewendung von 'heute' geben konnte. Doch vielleicht gibt es nur eine, deren Veröffentlichung angemessen wäre, sie würden den All-Brand, anders gesprochen den Holocaust und den Krematoriumsofen in allen jüdischen Sprachen der Welt auf Deutsch zum Ausdruck bringen," Jacques Derrida: *Feuer und Asche*, Paris, Berlin, 1988, p. 41f. quoted after Cordula Meier, Anselm Kiefer, *Die Rückkehr des Mythos in der Kunst*, p. 124-25

Theo Buck commented on Paul Celan's „Death Fugue“ as poetry that detonates the concept of beauty from the inside. Those who find Celan's poems beautiful fail to understand them.¹ There is a lot in common between Kiefer's art and Celan's poetry. Judging the poetry of Paul Celan and paintings of Anselm Kiefer in terms of beauty does not seem adequate. These works do not aestheticise history but rather tell the truth about death and suffering, using the anti-aesthetic language of destruction in image and in language. Few poems question the issue of beauty in art, not art itself, as poignantly as „Death Fugue“ of Celan.² The same applies to works of Anselm Kiefer. According to Celan himself "beauty exists only as something complementary."³ The women characters that both artists invoke in their works are referred to neither as objects of beauty nor of desire but rather as the remnants of what has been left of their mythic beauty. The myth of fascination and beauty about Sulamith and Margerete has been turned into mourning for their absence. (*Pic. 15. Margarethe, 1981, 280 x 380 cm, oil, acrylic, emulsion and straw on canvas, private collection*)

Among the various poets, whom Anselm Kiefer commemorates in his works, Paul Celan is the one who fundamentally influenced the artist's mode of expression. It is not only the homage to the poet, or the frequent allusion to quotations from the poet's verses. The texture of Kiefer's works itself with its ruin, fracture, destruction repeats the structure of the poetic language of Paul Celan - the „broken rhythm“ of the verses, „the suspension of the poem between speech and script.“⁴ Kiefer's complexity of semantic meanings, embedded in his symbolic ashen landscapes of commemoration, the openness for interpretation of his paintings, the attempt to speak the unspeakable of death and the sense of endless exile conveyed through painting is very near to the poetic style of Celan: „The text constructions introduced by Celan cause substantial increase: commemoration of the dead ... the reflection about the global potential of elimination, linguistically through the above-mentioned changes in expression, formally through the radical openness of the poem that turns into a complex 'text-landscape'.“⁵

¹ Buck Theo, Muttersprache-Mördersprache, Celan Studien I: "Wer die „Todesfuge“ 'schön' findet hat sie nicht verstanden," p. 87

² Buck Theo, Muttersprache-Mördersprache, Celan Studien I, Ibid

³ „Das schöne gibt es 'nur' als Komplementäres,“ quoted in Theo Buck, Bildersprache, Celan Studien II, p. 43

⁴ Theo Buck, Celan Studien, p. 97, quoted from Frey, Hans-Jost: Verszerfall; in: Frey, Hans-Jost/Lorenz Otto: Kritik des Freien Verses, Heidelberg 1980, pp. 67 and 72

⁵ "Die von Celan eng geführte Textkonstruktion erbringt in jeder Hinsicht substantiellen Zuwachs: ... Totengedenkens ... die Reflexion des globalen Vernichtungspotentials, Sprachlich durch die erwähnten Veränderungen im Ausdruck, formal durch die radikale Öffnung des Gedichts zu einer komplexen „Text-Landschaft,“ Ibid., p. 98, see also Szondi Peter, Durch die Enge geführt, p. 50

Kiefer's painted landscapes like Celan's text-landscapes mourn the past. They are not picturesque but dark and distorted by war. The images invoked by poetry of Celan and by Kiefer's paintings with citations inscribed over bare land do not glorify nature with welcoming colours or words, but emphasise the difference between man and nature, the impossibility of harmonious beauty. Kiefer's canvases with inscriptions of text fragments upon burnt landscapes are suggestive of different layers of meaning that cannot be defined in terms of beauty but rather in terms of ruin, torture, mourning about the destroyed beauty. The innocent beauty of German landscapes after the calamities of war has turned into a myth, that has been commemorated by Kiefer in ash and straw attached to canvas. Like Celan's poems, Kiefer's complex „text-landscapes“ are works of art that do not set new categories of beauty in art, but attempt to liberate artistic practice from the necessity to be beautiful. *(Pic. 16. Margarethe - Sulamith, 1981, 42 x 55, 8 cm, watercolour on paper, Anthony d'Offay, London)*

Kiefer's landscapes set a special relationship between the viewer and the painting. Such relationship requires not admiration with the visually appealing scenery but remembrance of the past that is gradually becoming myth. The fields with inscriptions commemorating Sulamith are fields below that correspond to the skies above. The ashen landscapes are empty, the horizon is far away, the terrain occupies the most part of the paintings of the burnt land and ruins. Anselm Kiefer's artistic language is similar to that of Paul Celan's. It is characterised by fragmentation of images and break like the fragmentation of word and sentence break, as well as the general reduction of expression by Celan. Such paintings with their gloomy uninviting palette or sculptures of deformed ruined forms can hardly be termed as beautiful. On the contrary they subvert the notion of beauty after the historical calamities. Such diversity of connotations is characteristic for the works of Anselm Kiefer in terms of semantic openness, dynamics, focus on fracture, the attempt to speak the unspeakable. If Celan created poetry with focus on values in art that are not dominated by beauty, but rather the opposite of it, broken syntax, changing rhythm, distortion of form, accumulation of metaphors ad absurdum, Kiefer introduced all this into the realm of painting.

Kiefer's painting does not attempt to aestheticise suffering and death, instead it imitates, experiments with forms, substances, language and writing to disturb, confuse, haunt the spectator with painful memories. Kiefer's artistic language imitates the destruction and ruin of

the war in an effort analyse its brutality against the background of seeming natural harmony. Unity of form in his works has been replaced by ruin, like in poetry of Celan, the sentences are fragmented, the symmetry is turned into asymmetry. „Todesfuge“ is not beautiful in the sense that it aestheticises and glorifies death, but tells the truth about it and commemorates the dead in word. There is no pathetic delight anticipating and beautifying death.

Kiefer's works are appealing not for beauty but the traumatic expressiveness, inner tension, richness of metaphors, broken rhythm, the innovative composition. They speak to the audience, confuse, traumatise. Paul Celan and Anselm Kiefer respectively created qualitatively different poetry and painting, that cannot be evaluated in terms of beauty standards. Their works provoke strong emotion in the spectator due to the painful, traumatic, dark reality that they reflect. Kiefer's paintings reflect the historical continuum after Auschwitz, with its aesthetics of destruction and ruin. The myth of beauty was ruined in Germany's recent history like the towers that Kiefer ruins and scatters around his Barjak studio. Kiefer's paintings convey the world without beauty. Viewing of these paintings or books is traumatic and causes the viewer to suffer during the mere act of reading or contemplating them. These are not glorifications of victims or of heroes, but silent mourning. Therefore beauty is not their primary function but the portrayal of how the myth about beauty in art as well as in reality has been disfigured and destroyed throughout the course of history. Kiefer's art does not aestheticise war: “ 'Fiat ars – pereat mundus', says fascism and expects, as Marinetti acknowledges, from war the artistic satisfaction of sensory perception altered by technology ... This is evidently the perfection of art for art's sake. Humanity that once in the epoch of Homer was the show object for Olympic gods, has turned into an object of observation for itself. Its self alienation has achieved the grade, when its own elimination provides it with the highest aesthetic pleasure. Thus one deals with the aestheticising of politics, which fascism implements. Communism answers it with politicising of art.”¹

The painting "Midsummer Night" /Johannisnacht/ made in 1981 relates to the pagan tradition

¹ " 'Fiat ars – pereat mundus,' sagt der Faschismus und erwartet die Künstlerische Befriedigung der von der Technik veränderten Sinneswahrnehmung, wie Marinetti bekennt, vom Kriege ... Das ist offenbar die Vollendung des l'art pour l'art. Die Menschheit, die einst bei Homer ein Schauobjekt für die olympischen Götter war, ist es nun für sich selbst geworden. Ihre Selbstentfremdung hat jenen Grad erreicht, der sie ihre eigene Vernichtung als ästhetischen Genuß ersten Ranges erleben läßt. So steht es um die Ästhetisierung der Politik, welche der Faschismus betreibt. Der Kommunismus antwortet ihm mit der Politisierung der Kunst," Walter Benjamin, Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit, in Aura und Reflexion, p. 413

of celebrating summer solstice, accompanied in Germany with bonfires, wedding the heavens and the earth. "Johannisnacht" is also known as the eve of Saint John, celebrating the birth of John the Baptist. Hitler chose this date for "Operation Barbarossa" to invade Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.¹ Midsummer night symbolised in pagan Germanic mythology the renewal, the new beginning and was celebrated with bonfires long before National-Socialists. "The midsummer night fire is part of the mythological topos, where fire accumulates purifying power. Association with world fire 'Weltenbrand' of Wagner's 'Twilight of the Gods,' that in the *Ring* will make possible the coming of the New Times, is here as evident as the allusion to bonfire as the revelation of the divine life-giving power."² Kiefer's "Midsummer Night" is a non-figurative abstraction, the canvass is painted black, dotted with white smears. The black surface can be interpreted both as the sky or the black earth scorched after the world fire - tabula rasa ready for the renewal. The darkness dominating the canvass also stands for the subconscious, the dark hidden area, the repressed memories. The abstract painting challenges the spectator's capacity of contemplation as well as the ability of understanding the complicated layers of meaning suggested by the title. Simultaneously the picture suggests the artist's attempt in this reductionist, abstract method to emphasise above all his artistic medium: the canvass covered with pigment, the rectangle of the medial support. The abstract picture includes all the implications, mythological or historical, that are related to "Johannisnacht" without emphasising any of them, but giving the viewer freedom to think on the topic.

In the lead painting with the same name "Johannisnacht," made in 1987-91 the picture surface is divided into several rectangles of lead sheets and a dried fern is attached to lead in a glassed steel frame. This painting with the fern dominating the composition mainly stresses the natural aspect, the folk tales related to plants, to the memories of primordial times suggested by ferns. One can differentiate layers of the medial surface that make up the painting: the rectangular sheets of lead imposed one upon another stretched over cardboard, soil, acrylic, singed spots and dried fern. These organic and inorganic layers making up the complicated fabric of the painting correspond to the complicated, superimposed layers of meaning suggested by the title. In both versions there is an obvious attempt on the part of the painter to attract the spectator's attention to the purely formal qualities of his work - the technique of application of pigment onto canvas, the medial surface, the composition, the colour, the

¹ Michael Auping, Anselm Kiefer, Heaven and Earth, p. 90

² Toni Stooss in Anselm Kiefer, Bücher, 1969-1990, p. 33

organic and inorganic substances attached to the surface.

Resurrection

Felix Zdenek in his review of Kiefer's paintings mentioned that his works are about the meaning and the purpose of painting in our time.¹ Painting is thematised in Kiefer's works via various contents: mythological, historical, art historical, religious, in different media: colour, photography, language, gestural painting, application of various organic and inorganic material onto the medial support. The purpose and meaning of painting remains however the question that can endlessly be interpreted and reinterpreted like the notions of religious mysticism or citations from poetry that Kiefer inscribes or represents in his paintings. His works thematise art as the opportunity of ascent from the secular, profane realm into a higher, spiritual one. They create the illusion of making visible the aspects that are esoteric, hidden, invisible: e.g. divine emanations. Kiefer makes his paintings seem as if they reveal aspects hidden beneath the medial surface, thematising sub-medial and the subconscious, esoteric phenomena - e.g. Sefitrot, Merkawa. The meaning and subject of painting in our time like in all times remains painting itself, its ability to interpret phenomena, visualise the invisible, or speak the unspeakable of human emotions, experiences and memories, optically creating semantic landscapes of meaning. Kiefer's motives are multi-valent, they are provocative, disturbing, mournful. He thematises painting as the medium reflecting the nature of things and of persons, including the nature of representation itself. At the same time Kiefer with his repetitive motive of ruin, melancholy and mourning emphasises the inability of painting, or of art in general, to change the course of events, of history, to prevent the inevitable violence and ruin. The artist's mourning and melancholy evident in his works is also caused by the inability of art to reveal and to explain the inner nature of the universal phenomena, the hidden and the unknown mechanisms of history, the invisible aspects that cannot be rendered visually or in word and thus always remain a mystery beyond understanding, beyond language and beyond painting. In Kiefer's works these unknown, mysterious aspects are rendered mostly in colour and in abstraction - e.g. by the blackness gaping beyond layers of matter applied to the medial support, or by the dark patches of burnt soil attached to canvass, by the fade-ins of the photo collages, the darkness of the black sunflower seeds attached to canvas.

¹Zdenek Felix, Anselm Kiefer, Catalogue, Museum Folkwang Essen, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, pp.11-12

One of the basic features of Kiefer's paintings and particularly landscapes is their universality. Even though the place names are sometimes indicated the spectator sees them as terrains, that might allude to any location on earth. These landscapes are charged with universal significance. Kiefer's paintings may seem crudely painted but the effect is controlled, deliberate and grounded in the knowledge. The colour pigment may be thick and lush in one painting, dry and drawn across the canvas in another, but the manner is deliberate and finely tuned according to the subject. The sombre dark tones are the allegory of the void created in postwar German society by the extermination and expulsion of a Jewish culture which for centuries had formed part of German history and thought.

In the painting "Faith, Hope, Charity," of 1976 like in the earlier analysed painting "Landscape with Head" made by Kiefer in 1975 the unusual form of the medial support is important. The painting is made up of two square-like parts - the upper part of the painting is a square, narrower than the one below. The painted palette that occupies the lower square, with the trees growing on it up into the upper narrower part of the painting, stress the flatness and the irregular form of the medial support, which indicates the experiments of the artist in search of the innovative artistic forms. "Faith, Hope, Charity" - the title is taken from the First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians, 13:13, which is part of the New Testament. The citation stresses the three main Christian virtues that were meant to supplement the cardinal virtues of antiquity. The religious virtues that Kiefer emphasises in his painting are also related to painting and correspond to the basic artistic virtues of shape, proportion, composition.

In the painting "Father, Son, Holy Ghost," of 1973 two squares are put together, one upon another. The bigger one below represents vertical tree trunks in a forest, the upper smaller square represents a wooden interior with three burning chairs and three windows behind them. The form of the medial support made up of different non-conforming shapes indicates the incompatibility of the subject matter represented in the lower part to the image on the upper part. The inscription in German "Vater, Sohn, Hl. Geist" that is the title of the work is made at the margin between the upper and the lower squares. The unusual form of the medial support where the upper part does not correspond to the lower one, formally stresses the incompatibility to one another of the subjects rendered on them, the forest below counterpoints the interior above. And although the wood is emphasised in both cases: below

as a natural element and in the attic as the material from which the interior's wood panelling is made, the two are incompatible. The same way as the world below is incompatible with the spiritual Christian aspect symbolised by the attic above with its non-consuming flames. The tree trunks are vertical and supposedly convey ascent, the panelling of the floor in the wood interior is laid horizontally, which creates the contradiction, producing an visually disturbing effect.

In the painting "Resurrexit" meaning "he has risen," the form of the medial support imitates movement upwards. The trapezia shape seamed to the square shape below creates the effect of one form transforming into the other and ascending through the painted blue sky, up to the painted wooden stairs towards the mysterious closed door. Here as well the incompatibility between the shapes and the subject matter is evident: below (a field in the wood, a serpent and trees under the blue sky) does not correspond to the masterfully executed wooden stairs leading to the door above. The "resurrexit" rendered in writing is incompatible with the "resurrexit" rendered in painting. Although writing and drawing might have the same origin they developed into two different media. The resurrection from the earthly realm below to the mysterious attic space above, via the sky, seems absurd, impossible and incoherent. The shapes that do not match one another make the two concepts of the lower and the upper realm impossible to match, the same way as the religious-mythological realm does not match the profane secular one. The mysterious wooden door above, towards which the 'resurrexit' is supposedly directed, is shut and denied for access. Kiefer thematises here painting as the medium that promises to reveal the mystery of redemption and attempts to represent its nature, but it does not offer the view into the inner realm of the phenomena, failing to show whatever is hidden behind the closed door. For Anselm Kiefer the resurrection from land, from German land in particular, equals an iconoclastic activity, which is impossible, inaccessible, denied, the same way as is denied the view into the inner space of the attic beneath the closed door. "He has risen" written in Latin - the language of the official Catholic church turns out to mean its opposite - the impossibility to rise, the denial of resurrection. According to the interpretation of the painting given in the catalogue dedicated to the exhibition in Kunsthalle Dusseldorf, Kiefer in this work conceptually paraphrased the Christian redemption myth "within the composition with the Chinese yin-yang philosophy which interested him at the time, 'The lower triangle represents the female, the upper the male

principle (cf. Duchamp's icon of the new century, the 'Nude descending a staircase' of 1912).¹
(Pic. 17. Resurrexit, 1973, 290 x 180 cm, charcoal, acrylic on burlap, upper trapezia part glued with pattex, lower part seamed vertically, up in the middle inscribed "resurrexit," Collection Sanders, Amsterdam)

Anselm Kiefer wants his landscapes to be like "heaven on earth", but he is aware of the impossibility of such a projection. In his work "Heaven on Earth" (1998-2004) a muddy road leads away from the viewer to the distant horizon. Barbed wire - a symbol of concentration camps - blocks the path to the artist's illusionary space. Kiefer's road to heaven informed by an awareness of history is paved with a scepticism that is turned against scientific certitude as it is against theological authority.²

The heaven and earth seem to be brought together by means of an artist's palette in the landscapes "Heaven-Earth" and "Painting of the Scorched Earth." Both are landscapes encircled by the rounded contours of a palette. In "Heaven-Earth," there is a distant view of the fields and mountains. The sky and the land are connected by a vertical line that symbolises the process of painting, as the accompanying inscription reads. The painting has a schematic character indicating the mutual interrelationship of the heavenly and the earthly aspects engendered by painting. The transparency of the palette creates the illusion of a screen that allows one to see through into the peaceful "heavenly" land. The palette is emphasised here as an artificial eye that makes it possible for the spectator to see heaven somewhere, where it does not belong - on earth. In fact the name Buchen alludes among others to Buchenwald - one of the biggest concentration camps on German soil, where from 1937 to 1945 about 238,380 people were incarcerated and which was further used from 1945 till 1950 by the Soviet Union as the special camp for Nazis and other Germans. It is also noteworthy that the Buchenwald concentration camp - the cite of mass torture and murder orchestrated by the Nazis is only eight kilometres away from the city of Weimar - the symbol of the richness and versatility of German cultural heritage. Weimar played an essential role in the history of German enlightenment. It was the place where Weimar Classicism originated at the end of the 18th century. The key figures of this literary movement that was based on the ideas of humanism were Schiller and Goethe who lived and worked in Weimar. The movement that also included Christoph Martin Wieland and Johann Gottfried Herder significantly influenced

¹ Jürgen Harten, Renata Sharp, Anselm Kiefer, p. 28

² Michael Auping, Anselm Kiefer, Heaven and Earth, p. 50

philosophy, psychology and art.

Weimar is also famous for the Bauhaus movement that was founded in 1919 by Walter Gropius. The Weimar Bauhaus school, where Wassily Kandinsky, Lyonel Feininger, Paul Klee and Oscar Schlemmer used to teach significantly contributed to the development of modernist art, design and architecture. The school was subsequently closed under the pressure of the Nazi regime and its representatives severely persecuted.

In Weimar Germany's first democratic constitution was signed in 1918 after the First World War. This historical fact initiated the Weimar Republic epoch in German history. Named after Weimar since the constitutional assembly took place there, the republic originated following the German Revolution of 1918. The Weimar Republic was a liberal democracy, it created a new constitution for the German Reich. The Republic reached its peak under the leadership of Reichskanzler Gustav Stresemann in the 1920-ies, the time remembered as the Roaring Twenties known in German as Goldene Zwanziger. Nevertheless the last years of the Weimar Republic were marked by political unrest and economic crisis. In 1933 the Weimar Republic actually ceased to exist and was replaced by the Nazi regime under Hitler's leadership.

Anselm Kiefer made not only paintings related to the district of Buchen situated in the affinity of Weimar but a series of books entitled "Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen" (Cauterisation of the District of Buchen). His scorched art books with cauterised pages invoke Weimar as the site of knowledge and literature accumulated in the books of one of the biggest European libraries - in Herzogin Anna Amalia Bibliothek (Duchess Anna Amalia Library). Founded in the 18th century this library contains an extensive collection of medieval and early modern manuscripts, volumes of Shakespeare's works, German literature, musical scripts and maps. Thus the district of Buchen situated in the affinity of Weimar rich with cultural traditions in Kiefer's works acquires the ambiguous connotation of a site where some of the most atrocious crimes against humanity took place and simultaneously as a symbol of the nation's cultural heritage, a place where originated some of the most progressive and humanistic movements in literature, art and politics, the storage of knowledge accumulated in its world-famous library.

The art of painting symbolised by the transparent palette in Kiefer's works can make a historically charged landscape, the topos of war and suffering appear as heavenly, creating an

optical illusion of harmony. Another work with the similar motive of landscape "Painting of the Scorched Earth" has the same composition: a smaller size palette encompasses "heaven and earth." Both paintings are based on respective photos that appear in Kiefer's art book "Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen" (Cauterisation of the District of Buchen) on respective double pages. The book was made by Kiefer in 1974. One can clearly recognise the same motives both in the paintings and in the photographs. But contrary to the photo, the painted landscapes are emotionally charged. The scenery in the "Heaven-Earth" is rendered peaceful and calm, making an ordinary landscape appear "heavenly" due to the painter's palette, whereas in the respective photograph the same piece of land with the inscription of the place name above is an ordinary rural district, rendered in monotonous black and white. On the contrary the land of the "Painting of the Scorched Earth" bears traces of devastation. Like in the respective photograph earth is burnt, there are flames in the distance. The most part of the painting is occupied by the dark earth, blackened with fire. The sky above is ominous. The main focus is on the palette and the scorched land that it is related to. Upon the wish of the artist painting appears to dramatise the events that appear insignificant and routine on the photograph. (*Pic. 18. Heaven - Earth, 1974, 70 x 195 cm, oil on canvas, private collection; pic. 18. a. Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen /Cauterisation of the Rural District of Buchen/ pp. 10-11*)

In these works one can trace a parallel between various media of representation: photography and painting. Photography - the medium of mechanical reproduction of an image, that is claimed to objectively represent reality by means of the camera eye, is compared to painting, the result of an artist's imagination. The landscape in the photograph in the book "Cauterisation of the District of Buchen" (pp. 134-135) and in the "The Painting of the Scorched Earth" represent the same subject in various media. In both cases the scenery appears staged. One is not sure if one observes real events that took place at a certain historical moment or if one is presented with the history created by the medium itself. Although the camera is not visible in the photographs unlike the painter's palette that is purposefully accentuated by the artist, one has the impression that the view is manipulated by the representation medium. It can make a significant dramatic event appear insignificant and on the contrary dramatise the trivial. The photographed landscape, like the painted one, although they actually refer to the same location, are rendered differently due to the different media: in the painting it appears to be a general concept of German land engulfed in the fire,

whereas in the book the photo supposedly documents the district of Buchen being cauterised, with location names indicated. And although photography claims to reproduce on film real events in real places indicated in the captions, one is not sure if the scene captured by the camera in Kiefer's book is staged or not, if it is recorded in Buchen or elsewhere. The events and the locations recorded by the camera appear as manipulated as the scenery represented by the painter in his painting. Kiefer accentuates the painter's palette as the medium that supposedly allows the spectator to see through its transparent surface and observe the landscape behind it. This accent on painting as the medium allowing a revelatory insight into events is absent from the corresponding photographs, where the spectator cannot see the camera lens. The fact that Kiefer accentuates painting as the medium that allows with the help of the transparent palette to make visible the invisible, hidden reality beneath the medial surface, evidences his choice of being a painter and not a photographer. Yet it still remains questionable, how much of the truth is revealed by the photo and how much more authentic and revelatory is the medium of painting. Here it is the question not of the contents - the represented image - since both in the photos and in the respective paintings it is the same landscape depicted, but in the self-reduction and disappearance in order to accentuate the medium itself, make the medium speak its respective language in order to reveal the hidden nature of events. By repeatedly placing the transparent palette superimposed onto his painted landscapes, Kiefer makes an attempt to analyse the medium of painting as the medium of revelation, as an eye offering the opportunity to open up the prospect of understanding the world, he represents by means of painting. He also transfers to the spectator the message of the medium of painting through the colour, texture, applied materials, bodily traces left upon the medial surface. The dominating black, sombre, ochre colours, scorched pieces of soil, straw, hair, splinters mixed with thick layers of pigment, words inscribed over the canvasses, the sheer monumentality of the paintings or books make the medium speak for itself delivering its message. In making the language of the medium his own language Kiefer thus achieves particular, deeper intimacy with the spectator allowing to bridge the gap between the viewer/reader and the author. The painter thus becomes the messenger of his medium - painting. Like the poems of Paul Celan, which Kiefer incorporates into his works, he speaks the spectator's inner language, he addresses his subconscious. By rejecting the task of conveying the message of his own, and rendering this mission to the medium of painting itself, Kiefer allows the spectator to analyse representation independently from the viewpoint of the artist, but at the same time, accepting, appropriating the language of his medium, Kiefer

finally becomes its only messenger. (Pic. 19. *Malerei der Verbrannten Erde*, /*Painting of the Scorched Earth*/, 1974, 95 x 125 cm, oil on burlap, private collection; pic. 19. a. *Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen* /*Cauterisation of the Rural District of Buchen*/ pp. 134-135)

In Kiefer's paintings landscapes emerge as books on which history inscribed itself. They seem to be passive, deserted, impartial witnesses of events in time, terrains subject to transformations, violence, desecralisation or purification by fire. Painting itself as an empty deserted landscape, that is made up of layers of colour pigment, soil, ash, straw mounted on photograph, canvas, cardboard or lead emerges as an empty page of a book, or as a screen that creates the illusion of making readable and visible the unreadable, the invisible and the inconceivable aspects either of history or of mythology. Both photography and painting as representational media included into a book format are opposed to it. Images counterpoint the book format that implies reading not viewing. Images divided in the middle, limited within the boundaries of the book pages, sometimes even sacrificed to the book format (to make some of the pages Kiefer cauterised a certain amount of his former painted canvases) appears insufficient, confined within its physicality as compared to the unlimited, infinite immateriality of the language implied by the book. This abstract immateriality of language is paralleled by the abstraction of the empty, cauterised book pages in black. The book is actually reduced to pure medial support in its apparently absolute state of emptiness, from the pages of which content has been erased as insignificant and contaminated, like history can be erased from the eternity of time, or mythological archetypes from collective memory. The book without any text or image seems to overwhelm both representation and writing that are only imitating, copying reality. The book with cauterised empty pages that evidently survived all-consuming flames symbolises the higher divine aspect. Its pages bearing traces of fire contain inscriptions that are unreadable, unintelligible but terrifying for the spectator. Yet neither painting, nor book or photography are able to clarify or reveal anything, they merely represent a universal landscape as a topos of horror that has to be remembered and mourned in various media accentuating the empty, dark, heavily worked texture of the medial support. (Pic. 20. *Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen* /*Cauterisation of the Rural District of Buchen*/ pp. 150-151)

For the first time the motive of death symbolised by the artist representing himself dead, appeared in Kiefer's „Broken Flowers and Grass”, 1980. The black-and-white schematic

contours of the broken flowers and the grass correspond with the black-and-white of the photo in the background. The continuity between the two aspects: the realm of the dead and that of the living is visually rendered by the rhythm of the brush-strokes, as well as by the colour contrasts.

In the painting „Nebelland hab ich gesehen, Nebelherz hab ich gegessen (Für Ingeborg Bachmann)" (I saw the country of fog, I ate the heart of fog, For Ingeborg Bachmann)" the theme of death reappears. This time the image of a dead body is represented lying at the foot of a pyramid. The work is deeply melancholic, its monumental size (570 cm x 800 cm) and frontal character appeals to the spectator. The human body at the bottom of the pyramid appears insignificant, dwarfed by the impressive scale of the archaic stone structure, in fact the human figure appears as one of the pyramid's components, one of the numerous stones that make it up. The pyramid appears to be a monument of commemoration of the dead, it dominates the pictorial composition. One feels its immediate presence and materiality due to the sand, soil and other elements attached to canvas. The image of a pyramid composed of stones piled upon each other prompts the interpretation of the space rendered in the painting as a location charged with centuries-old cultic meanings, related to the rituals of burial, veneration and remembrance of the dead. The custom of bringing stones to the burial places and the construction of pyramids as monuments of remembrance of the dead is the tradition that goes back to prehistoric times. In archaic religious consciousness stones evoked the divine spirit: giant megaliths used to serve as monuments to the dead.¹ According to ancient beliefs the divine used to manifest itself in stone, ... it was the incarnation of the divine.² Moreover stones assembled at the tomb used to mark it as “the place where the worlds of the dead, of the living and of gods converged, thus such a place was the 'centre' and 'the navel of the world' at the same time.”³

In Kiefer's painting one can hardly differentiate the bodily contours from the rocky background. The citation that Kiefer put into the context of his landscape with the pyramid creates the effect of bodily communion with the dead and with the environment as well as revelation via "seeing the country of fog". This mysterious "seeing" is made possible for the spectator by means of painting and makes visible whatever otherwise would remain invisible

¹ Mircea Eliade, *Die Religionen und das Heilige*, p. 252

² Ibid. p.265

³ Ibid. p.268

like “Nebelland”. Kiefer's “pyramids are obscured by the sandy mist of time.”¹

In the painting „Pietà“, 2007, the motive of death is analysed within the framework of Christian doctrine. Here again Kiefer represents himself dead lying on the ground with plants growing from the soil underneath. The title “Pietà” (Italian for “pity”) refers to the subject in art related to the Virgin Mary mourning over the dead body of Jesus. Most often the theme has been rendered in sculpture, as for example, Michelangelo's masterpiece of renaissance sculpture the “Pietà“ in St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican. As such “Pietà” is related to the Lamentation of Christ, a scene from the Passion of Christ. The subject is very common in Christian art from early Middle Ages to the Baroque. After Jesus was crucified his body was removed from the cross and his friends and family mourned over his body.

In Kiefer's interpretation of the subject the image of the Virgin Mary cradling the body of Jesus is absent. The body of Jesus is replaced by the body of the artist whereas the image of the Virgin Mary is replaced by mother nature cradling the lifeless body. The artist attempts here to attach an image to the imageless and the unimaginable of death by means of painting. The theme of vegetation as the symbol of the motherly, nurturing aspect is of essential importance in the picture. The vegetation coming from mother earth underscores in the painting the role of nature as the source of life, the sacred aspect equalised to the sacred motherly aspect of the Holy Mary in Christianity. In archaic mythologies it was widely believed that after death the human body “reintegrates” with mother earth becoming one with it. From immemorial times death was perceived as the return to the motherly realm of nature. “Death is nothing other than the change of modalities, the passage into a different stage of existence, the reintegration with the generic motherly realm ... via the changing of form; instead of having the human guise the dead will acquire the guise of a tree”² or of other plants.

In Kiefer's painting „Pietà“ Jesus removed from the cross is embodied by the artist's self-portrait as dead. The artist compares the fate of the painter to that of Jesus: the fate of suffering, alienation, sacrifice. „The descent of God's son is an embodiment, which had not existed before. And in the Eucharist, too – *'hoc est enim corpus meum'* -, it is an absolute

¹ Michael Auping, Heaven and Earth, p. 41

² Mircea Eliade, Die Religionen und das Heilige, pp. 352-353

embodiment.”¹

Landscapes with Graves

Alaric I. the rebellious Visigoth (about 370-410) commander-in-chief under the Romans was about to cross over to Africa after three days of sacking Rome but died on the way and was buried in the bed of the Busento near Cosenza. In his poem *"The Grave in the Busento"*, August von Platen (1796-1835) described how the water was diverted, Alaric buried, arms, horse and all, and the river returned to its natural course so that the grave remains inaccessible in the depths. The landscape in Kiefer's painting *"Alaric's Grave"* is rendered in distemper (Leimfarbe) on burlap, made up of two horizontal parts. The black lines and curves make a schematic sketch of a house surrounded with trees, that are reflected below in the water. Along with Alaric and his story that is important here, what mainly interests the painter is the aspect of the hidden and the deep, resting beneath the surface. The horizontal line dividing the land from the water is simultaneously the line dividing the real, secular world from the surreal, subconscious, hidden deep down below. Unlike other Kiefer's landscapes the deepness is rendered in *"Alaric's Grave"* not by means of perspective or by application of thick layers of pigment, organic matter, ready-mades or photo-paper onto medial surface. Deepness is merely rendered here in a sketchy drawing that reveals the surface plane above and its mirrored reflection below in the water that occupies a greater and more abstract part of the painting. The seemingly peaceful river landscape is not what it appears to be, its mysteries are buried, unknown and inaccessible for the spectator not initiated into its history. Almost all Kiefer's landscapes have a similar air of hidden mystery about them, which is related to their historical past. What appears to be a peaceful landscape is indeed a location of historical catastrophes, with the scars hidden beneath the surface of sand, straw or layers of colour pigment. The painting deals with the barbaric Visigoth leader but moreover it deals with the aspect of the unknown and the possibilities of revelation by means of art. It is Kiefer's painting, that reveals to the spectator the unknown, buried truth about the place which appears otherwise a neutral, rural landscape. Painting is thematised here on the one hand as reflection of reality, like water in the river or mirror and, on the other hand, painting is analysed as the

¹ Interview with Anselm Kiefer in Anselm Kiefer, *Maria durch ein Dornwald ging*, Exhibition Catalogue, p.119

medium that attempts to reveal the unknown, inner nature of phenomena, that are otherwise hidden from the eye, be it events of history or of mythology. The melancholy of Kiefer's painting's however is caused, among other things, by the fact that such reflection as well as revelation is only partial and does not reveal much about the inner nature of things including the inner meaning and purpose of painting itself. These still remain inaccessible and dark, like the bottom of the river containing the tomb with its buried secret. (*Pic. 21. Alaric's Grave, 1975, 220 x 330 cm, distemper on burlap, horizontally seamed on two parts, New Gallery of Aachen - Collection Ludwig*)

The painting "Tomb of the Unknown Painter" made in 1974 (oil, emulsion, synthetic resin, felt-tip pen on burlap with inscription: "Grab des unbekannten Malers") thematises painting and the fate of painter within German history, as well as within historical context in general. In the painting the outlines of the tomb are visually buried under the frontal layer of white pigments indicating snow flakes, dubbed and scattered all over the canvas surface. What lies beneath the abstract flat two-dimensional surface seems to be "the grave of the unknown painter". The picture appears to reveal the hidden grave and at the same time conceals it, due to the profusion of abstract dabs of paint applied to the medial surface. Making an abstraction with elements of figuration, Kiefer creates the effect of allowing the spectator see through the surface plane covered with abstract dabs of colour pigment, it is as if the spectator gets the chance to glimpse deep beneath the painting's surface plane. The inner core of the painting appears to loom beneath the rough surface layer. This results in a heightened tension between the illusion of deepness and the pronounced two-dimensionality of the surface plane. If in "Alaric's Grave" deepness was rendered as a schematic division of the picture plane into the upper part above the water and the lower part below the water with the painting combined of two separate boards glued together, the aspect of deepness in the "Tomb of the Unknown Painter" is rendered through formal qualities of the painting technique, that conceals figuration beneath the surface layer of an abstraction. The outlines of the "tomb" are actually "buried" beneath the surface of thick dabs of colour pigment symbolising snow. The marks of colour pigment made by the painter's brush stresses the physicality of the medial surface. The principle of the visible versus the invisible is rendered by Kiefer in two media: in representation and in writing. Both convey the same message in two stylistically different ways. On the canvass surface the writing made in black together with dabs of white pigment appear as ornamental elements composing the complicated pattern on the picture surface. The

identity of the painter is buried beneath the events of history - it is "unknown", whereas the subject matter of painting is buried beneath the layer of colour pigment applied to flat medial surface. "Unknown painter" is compared to unknown soldier, but what is really "unknown" here is, the inner nature of painting as the medium of representation, as well as the inner nature of language, or the inner mechanism of history, which painting fails to reveal and to which both the artist and the soldier fall victim. The dubs of white colour pigment, the inscription and the contours of the grave beneath only represent, leaving phenomena "unknown" and unexplained. The unknown painter refers to the heritage of German painting contaminated by fascism which, together with the identity of the painter remains the symbol of failed art, associated with the death cult, devaluation of art, buried under the heavy burden of history. (Pic. 22. *Grave of the Unknown Painter*, 1974, 115 x 161 cm, oil, emulsion, synthetic resin, felt-tip pen, inscription: "Grab des unbekannten Malers," private collection)

The "unknown" can be associated with the void. Kiefer's painting "Horror vacui" made in 1979 is stylistically similar to the "Tomb of the Unknown Painter." The abstract picture surface is covered profusely with colour pigments scattered all over the rectangular canvass. The colour pigment itself, the trace of the brush on the canvass is the main focus of the painter in this work. The dubs of paint create an visual effect that characterises the medial surface as impenetrable, non-transparent flat space covered densely with thick smears that form an abstract, randomly applied pattern. "Horror vacui, the fear of emptiness, is a natural-philosophical term originating from Aristotle and claiming that nature knows no vacuum but will always have filled empty spaces; in art history, used descriptively rather than symptomatically for a profusion of surface treatment (e.g. guillosche ornamentation, mannerism)."¹ The picture surface is filled in "Horror vacui" with colour pigments which cover up the vacuum and the void beneath, in the supposedly dark and empty submedial space that is compared to ontological emptiness per se. According to the ancient Hebraic creation myth God had to withdraw to create the void for the world to come into being.

"Operation Landscapes"²

"Operation pictures" are landscapes of abandoned terrains of land, the surface of which

¹ Jürgen Harten, Renata Sharp, Anselm Kiefer, Catalogue for the exhibition at the State Art Gallery, Dusseldorf, p. 53

² Götz Adriani, Toni Stooss, Peter Schjeldahl, Zdenek Felix, Anselm Kiefer, Bücher, 1969-1990, p. 60

coincides with the surface of a painter's palette. The fragile, schematic contours of a palette - white against black - encompasses the dark land that merges in the distance with the night sky. Kiefer compares a military operation like "Operation Hagenbewegung" or "Operation" to painter's lifelong "operation" of painting. Paintings "Operation Hagenbewegung" and "Operation Barbarossa" are made in 1975, they bear the names of the Nibelung Hagen and of Emperor Frederik Barbarossa. The landscapes are rendered in oil on burlap. In representing the landscapes the artist makes major focus on the optical effect emphasising the variation of colour, planar direction, and depth: white furrows of earth converging and vanishing at one point in the distance. On the other hand it is evident that the perspective is illusory due to the flat surface of the transparent palette superimposed upon the night landscape, stressing the rough medial surface of the picture. The representation optically vibrates between illusory depth and flatness of the two-dimensional picture plane. The resulting visual ambiguity corresponds to the ambiguity of painting as medium of representation in history, in National-Socialist history and generally in art history. The pictorial tension created by Kiefer by means of vibration from front to back and from back to front, pulling the view back into illusionist depth and simultaneously concentrating on the rough texture made up of dubs of paint on the palette surface, was first introduced into painting by modernists Paul Cezanne, Van Gogh, Claude Manet. Giving his landscapes the names of Nazi military operations Kiefer thematises the destiny of rejection of modernist heritage within his country's fascist history. Modernism was persecuted and banned in the Third Reich, replaced by stagnation which is remembered as a dark spot in history, rendered as the dark landscapes. The medial surface of the "operation pictures" - burlap - is a rough texture with thick paint dubs, which is at the same time the surface of the painter's palette and simultaneously the surface of the land. The painter's palette although transparent does not reveal the inner nature of the medium, of history, or of the land itself. The "window of the palette"¹ is illusory, it does not open up any views inside the mechanisms of history or of nature. Painting seems to be a reflection of events and things without the ability to reveal or to explain the inner core of phenomena, it can only name and represent them upon the will of the painter.

(Pic. 23. Operation Hagenbewegung, 1975, 130 x 150 cm, oil on burlap, up on the right inscription: "Unternehmen 'Hagenbewegung', private collection)

Snow Landscapes

¹ Ibid.

The theme of a landscape as the terrain of eternal winter and mourning was thematised by Kiefer in a set of pictures dedicated to Brunhilde. "Siegfried Forgets Brunhilde" made in 1975 is a snowy terrain of a furrowed land abandoned for winter. Feminine aspect that mythologically is identified with land meets at the horizon with the sky symbolising the divine, male aspect. The land is represented as unfruitful bare terrain forsaken by God. "Siegfried forgets Brunhilde"¹ inscribed on the snow appears as the pattern of writing that indicates the memory of suffering and oblivion. The inscription seems a lament written over the landscape black on white like on a page of a book. In this impressionist-like landscape executed in rough brushwork, oil on canvass, filling the whole picture surface, Kiefer thematises the medium of painting against the medium of language.

The lament inscribed in language is reinforced by the lament rendered in painting. The German landscape is reduced to a white space crossed by black furrows resembling a page crossed with lines for writing, while Brunhilde's fate is reduced to words of suffering barely readable on the white snow. Brunhilde's tragic fate is depicted in language and in image. Kiefer purposefully invokes here a motive from the myth of the Nibelungs, that is related to suffering and death of its protagonists. Teutonic mythology is also the mythology misappropriated by fascists and is associated with the traumatic memories of suffering and death of the Holocaust victims. These memories contaminate the apparently peaceful winter landscape. Brunhilde's fate is represented as timeless symbol of universal suffering rendered in "tragic myth." "The tragic myth, as far as it is related to art, takes part in its metaphysic purpose of enlightenment: yet what does it make clear, when it presents the world of appearances as the image of the suffering hero? The 'reality' of this world of appearances..."²

In „Couronne noir“ /Black crown/, 2005, the monotonous winter landscape covered with snow occupies more than half of the canvas. The snow-covered terrain is criss-crossed with rows of dark burnt wood disappearing in the perspective. The presence of wood is also physically intensified by the bundle of dry tree branches stapled on a chair attached to the canvas. The landscape looks like an abandoned military terrain, a depressive topos of emptiness. The dark-grey sky is covered with inscriptions of lament quoted from the mournful

¹ "Siegfried vergisst Brünhilde," in Wagner's "Götterdämmerung" a magic potion has the effect of making Siegfried lose his memory of the beloved.

² Der tragische Mythos sofern er überhaupt zur Kunst gehört nimmt auch vollen Anteil an dieser metaphysischen Verklärungsabsicht der Kunst überhaupt: was verklärt er aber wenn er die Erscheinungswelt unter dem Bilde des leidenden Helden vorführt? Die "Realität" dieser Erscheinungswelt ..." Friedrich Nietzsche, Kurt Hildebrandt, Reclam, Leipzig, 1930, Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geist der Musik, p. 151

poetry of Paul Celan: ...die ostlichen Himmel mit Leidengewebe dein liebliche Name, des Herbstes, Rünengespinst ach band ich mit irdischen Rast, mein Herz in die himmlische und wein wenn der Wind sich schon hebt das die Klage..."¹ The white winter landscape below punctured with wood is like an open page of a book of mourning, that imitates the heavenly inscriptions above in the lead-coloured sky. The writings above corresponding to the divine aspect: white against the grey background are reflected by the handwriting of history below: the dark signs of violence on the snow. The letters making up the text of sorrowful lament correspond to the carbonised, black wood pieces, the leftovers of war. Kiefer once more makes a parallel between a landscape and an open book as well as landscape and a stage. The chair with a heap of dry branches implies the spectator to watch the tragic theatre of history. The empty chair also suggests absence, replacement of the living by the inanimate nature. The inscriptions above are the only indication of spiritual presence in the otherwise desperately lonesome landscape that belongs to death. Mourning communicated in language speaks to the viewer, causing emotional response. Writing crowns the landscape with the crown of mourning. The pattern of writing that communicates the pattern of suffering is the only adornment of the bare land. Letters as the crowns of wisdom - white against the black, run contrary to the carbonised wood bundles – crowns of sorrow, depicted black against the white. (*Pic. 24. Couronne Noir (Black Crown), 2005, 190 x 330 cm, oil, emulsion, acrylic, pencil, dried branches, metal on canvas*)

The same motive of a deserted snow-covered landscape punctured with wood branches appears in „Das Einzige Licht“ /The Only Light/ 2005. Here as well human absence is emphasised through writing, that is hardly readable against the snow. Nobody occupies the joint together wooden seats attached to the canvas in the painting's lower part. Spectators are replaced by a bundle of tree branches and a lead boat. The introduction of seats into the painting's composition implies an anonymous spectator for whom the whole landscape with the past or future events related to it might promise a theatrical spectacle. The seats face the viewer, inviting one to enter the imaginary realm of the landscape. On the other hand, attached with their backs to the painting's surface, the row of seats creates an impenetrable borderline between the world of the spectator and that of the artistic spectacle. History, to which Kiefer always refers, is rendered against the background of a gloomy landscape as a meaningless brutal theatre, which art attempts to interpret and represent. Judging from the

¹ ...the Eastern sky covered with the net of suffering your name autumn, the ghost of the runes, I gathered with the earthly rest, my heart in the heavens and cry when the wind raises with the lament...

gloomy palette of the painting it is a failed spectacle of devastation and the seats are empty. "The only light," introducing the semantics of hope, relates to the inscription above, in white against the dark background of the sky. The inscription functions as the word of God, as the emanation of the sacred light, amid the godforsaken topos. The word „Licht“ /light/ is purposefully written in white, in an unstable handwriting as the articulation of unstable hope. The white colour of „the light“ seems reflected from the snow below. The allusion to the light brought by writing however emphasises its absence rather than presence. The white colour of the landscape, the colour of the snow although dominates the painting, is muted and subdued.

The motive of chairs emerged in Kiefer's art back in the 70-ies. „Father, Son, Holy Ghost,“ 1973 is a religious painting, representing the holy symbols of Christianity as burning chairs/thrones. This time as well the chairs are intended for the spectator, they imply a spectacle of religious salvation. Placed on the wooden floor of the attic, which very much reminds a stage, the burning flames are as much part of this spectacle as the spectator observing them. The observer is in fact always implied in Kiefer's work: the chairs, the central perspective, the texts written on the canvases establish a certain dialogue with the viewer.

White as the opposite of black is emphasised once more in the landscape „Aschenblume für Paul Celan“ /Ash Flower - for Paul Celan/ 2006. The snow-covered land occupies the major part of the canvass, leaving a thin streak of the sky visible. The wood pieces arranged in rows on the snow disappear in the distance. They stick out of the ground like signs of remembrance for the dead. The terrain looks like a cemetery. From the hardly identifiable text written across the snow one can read out a reference to Jacob and his relation to the celestial realm. The text follows the line of the narrowing perspective, the size of the letters dynamically reduces in the distance heading towards the sky, the line of the written text follows the line of the black rows of the snow covering the landscape. Kiefer reintroduces here a book into the landscape. The square lead book, the symbol of God in Kabbala mysticism, simultaneously stands for a tortured book of poetry commemorating Paul Celan. It harmonises with the overall composition of the painting. It is also the book of remembrance of the dead, with the black flocks - the black letters on the snow serving as an extension to its obliterated text. The lead book, the black letters and the carbonised wood pieces are the components of a winter landscape the same way as letters are components of the text inscribed into the book attached to the painting's surface.

Ascent

The reference to Jacob in the „Schwarze Flocken“ (Black Flocks) locates deserted German landscape not only as the topos of death but as the terrain with the possibility (path) of ascension. The work corresponds to Kiefer's earlier picture „Eisen Steig“ /Iron Path/, 1986. The text in „Schwarze Flocken“ referring to Biblical Jacob forms a hardly visible but a continuous path leading upwards, towards the lead book and eventually towards the heavens. The book although impossible to read stands as the synonym of a poetic or artistic ideal, which although unattainable and distant, might be interpreted as the sign of hope amid hopelessness. Such paths of written text first appeared in Kiefer's mythological landscapes related to Brunhilde: „Siegfried vergisst Brunnhilde“ /Siegfried forgets Brunhilde/, was the path of oblivion left by a human body - handwriting, upon the indifferently white snow. The path of „Eisen Steig“ is also the path of oblivion and death - rail road tracks out of use on which previously the Holocaust victims were delivered to concentration camps. The presence of the railway tracks indicates the industrialised, well-calculated character of the state organised mass killings of Jews that Paul Celan mourns in his poetry. The use of the radical one-point perspective drags the viewer into the picture, imitating the process of movement across the landscape deep inside and simultaneously upwards. "Iron Path" does not necessarily represent the path of salvation guided by the movement of artistic progress, or any final alchemical transformation, but rather the monotonous perspective of the difficult, tortured way that lies ahead of art in the post-Holocaust landscape of cultural emptiness. Kiefer's "Iron Path" does not indicate movement either, since the ready-made shoes nailed to the surface imply stagnation. According to Mark Rosenthal the path in this painting „takes up the task of approaching a higher plane of existence...the vertical effort begins in the human, earthly realm and rises compellingly towards a horizontal. The rail road tracks separate near the top, approaching a pair of glowing, gold-leaf orbs above the horizon...the rail road tracks emphasise both the idea of moving across the land and a vertical posture.“¹

The motive of a path leading vertically to the upper edges of the bare terrain appeared in Kiefer's works as early as 1974 in „March Heath,“ /Märkische Heide/ 1974. This painting is based on a photograph included into the art book “Cauterisation of the Rural District of Buchen” pages 50-51. Both the painting and the black-and-white photo in the book represent

¹ Mark Rosenthal, Anselm Kiefer, p. 143

a barren landscape of Eastern region of Germany. This region corresponds to the idea of the Eastern landscape as a topos of failure, mourning, frustration. Like in „Iron Path“ the heath in both works can be followed visually as the movement across the terrain into the vanishing illusory perspective as well as a vertical movement upwards. The flat two-dimensionality of the picture is accentuated by the vertical trunks of the birches in the right corner. "March Heath" once more stresses the topic of ways in Kiefer's works. The path designates the structure of pictorial composition, with its vanishing perspective modelled to represent receding planes. The illusory dynamics of the perspective leads the spectator's view deep into the terrain till the point where the path disappears at the border with the skies, while at the same time the handwritten title "Märkische Heide" in the front part of the painting creates the illusion of two-dimensionality and flatness of the pictorial surface. The deserted terrain with a path leading to the very edge might be interpreted as an attempt to approach „some absolute state.“¹ Kiefer's painted landscapes are mostly of universal character. He creates them to stress the apparent, illusory calmness and beauty of the land, which has been in fact distorted by war and bears traces of death and suffering. Although these landscapes carry the names of particular places, they basically refer to a landscape per se. With the universal similarity of motives, of composition and variations in details they reverberate without changing and present an enclosed and instantaneous, yet infinite variety. On the contrary the landscapes Kiefer photographs for his books bear traces of wars and devastation. Unlike the painting the path in the photo from the art book indicates the way through the terrain distorted, turned black by fire and the idea of ascent suggested by the path in the picture is overshadowed in the photo by the idea of disorientation on the way into nowhere. (Pic. 25. *Märkische Heide (March Heath)*, 1974, 118 x 254 cm, oil, acrylic, shellac on burlap, below inscription: "Märkische Heide," Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. Pic. 25. a. *Book Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen /Cauterisation of the District of Buchen/1974, pp. 50-51*)

Vertical movement upwards towards the heavenly realm is emphasised in the painting „Jacobsleiter“ /Jacob's Ladder/. The way up however is not an „iron path“ but a fragile brick-like structure that falls apart. Kiefer represents an attempt of spiritual ascent as potential failure, frustration. In „Jacob's Dream“ 2008 the same unstable ladder leads up to the sky. The title of these two paintings refers to Jakob the Patriarch of the Hebrew people with whom God made a covenant. Jakob was the ancestor of the tribes of Israel. Jakob's Ladder is the ladder to Heaven, described in the Book of Genesis (28.19-19), of which Jakob dreamt during his flight

¹ Ibid.

from his brother Esau.

In this dream Jakob saw a ladder that lead from earth to the heaven. Angels were ascending and descending it. The Lord stood above it and spoke to Jakob, promising him that the land he stood upon would belong to his descendants. According to Philosopher Philo (d. ca 50 CE) Jakob's dream of the ladder and the angels climbing up and down was interpreted as the souls descending and ascending after death. According to the Torah the ladder indicated the exile that the Jews were supposed to suffer. The angels would climb up a particular amount of steps and fall down. The fall would indicate the end of the exile whereas the number of the climbed steps referred to the duration of the exile in years. The angels representing the exile of Babylonia, of Persia and of Greece fell down pretty soon. Only the fourth angel, representing the exile of Rome climbed the ladder higher and higher, but God assured Jakob that at the End of Days this angel too would fall.

The place at which Jacob stopped for the night was Mount Moriah, the future location of the Temple of Jerusalem, the stone he slept on, Bethel, is believed to be the House of God, "the world's center" the place of communication of the earthly with the divine connected with the ladder.¹

The white, ash-covered dresses on hooks are helplessly attached to the ladder at each side, implying ascent. Both the ladder and the ash dresses are charged with the mythological and Jewish religious symbolism. The angels' gowns obliterated by time and smeared with ash might symbolise both the lost souls hovering in the heavens as well as the return to the holy land from the exile.

Vertical ascent as well as horizontal movement to the inner deeper edge of the landscape is suggested in the painting "Olympe - Für Victor Hugo," 2005-2006. This landscape thematises the topic of ascent of an artist to the Olympian, divine realm. The flight of the perspective leads the view of the spectator to the furthest and supposedly highest spot in the landscape, where the lines meet to form the symbolic summit, the virtual Olympus. This point is marked with an inscription "Olympe" above the horizon line. Kiefer represents an artistic ideal from the times of antiquity - Olympus - as the ambiguous, indefinite and unattainable goal at a

¹ Mircea Eliade, *Die Religionen und das Heilige*, p. 267

vanishing point, set deep in the perspective. What appears like artistic Olympus is in fact a monotonous, deserted landscape through which an artist has to make his tortured way of isolation, rejection, frustration and misunderstanding.

The traumatic experience of permanent suffering spelled out in writing over the landscape articulates the ordeal of constant wakefulness. "Wach im Zigeunerlager, wach im Wüstenzelt, es rinnt uns der Sand aus den Haaren" (Awake in the gipsy camp and the desert tent, the sands runs out of our hair)," a line from Ingeborg Bachmann's poem "Das Spiel ist Aus" (The Game is Over) serves as the title for Kiefer's painting made in 1997. One sees desert land, bricks most likely the remains of Mesopotamian Ziqqurat and barbed wire. The painted horizon line coincides with the line of writing that follows its designated linear route from left to right, suggestive of movement. The exhausting state of being on the verge of death yet still awake, rendered in the poem, expresses the human condition of timeless suffering as a universal state.

Like Bachmann's poem "Das Spiel ist Aus," the motive of the bricks disappearing by attrition on the desert sand, underpins the theme of death. Mesopotamian Ziggurat – sacred monuments, some of the world's oldest existing burial constructions, render the site depicted by the painter as that of mourning. The poetic and the mythological aspects emphasise here the mnemonic dimension of art. Mircea Eliade considered archaic burial places to be of particular significance: "grave was the center (*mundus*); 'such graves were named *mundus* like the universe itself," Plutarch says, *Romulus* 12. At such places cross three cosmic zones (Macrobius, *Saturnalia* I, 16, 18)."¹ Seeing, reading, deciphering are introduced as the means for remembrance.

Writing as the human trace incorporated into painting also intensifies its mnemonic aspect "... the presence of writing is the presence of the origin, of the initial, of the times when one begins to write ... materiality itself, matter like the thought of the universe, like writing ... he (Kiefer) writes over his pictures - he inscribes painting. Its trace is a kind of mark on the material, pictorial surface ... on the body of painting things are inscribed, or remains of things, rather than words."² In his picture "Wach im Zigeunerlager..." the abstraction of language is

¹ „Der Graben war ein *mundus*; „man hat diesem Graben wie dem Universum den Namen *mundus* gegeben,“ sagt Plutarch, *Romulus* 12. An diesem Ort überschneiden sich drei kosmische Zonen (Macrobius, *Saturnalia* I, 16, 18). “ Mircea Eliade, *Die Religionen und das Heilige*, p. 430

² .. la présence du écriture est présence d'origine, de l'originare, d'un temps où l'on apprenait à écrire ...

pitted against the abstraction of time. Writing inscribed into painting serves to awaken memories effaced by time, like the remnants of ancient graves reduced to ruins, that still keep memory of the those buried in them. The linear movement of writing over the pictorial surface suggests the linear aspect of time during which this movement takes place. The signs of decomposition of the mastaba suggest the erasure of the inscription, one becomes aware of the movement towards disappearance.

Entitling his painting after Ingeborg Bachmann, Kiefer makes the language of poetry his medium to speak the unspeakable of universal estrangement, isolation and permanent exile. Language as the medium, supposed to communicate a certain message, suggests permanent movement, shifting of meaning and endless possibilities of interpretation beyond conventional signification. (*Pic. 26. Wach im Zigeunerlager und wach im Wüstenzelt. Es rinnt uns der Sand aus den Haaren, 1997, 280 x 560 cm, acrylic, shellac, burnt clay, iron on canvas, private collection*)

The monumental landscape "Aperiatur Terra et germinet salvatorem" (2005-2006) is also related to poetry: the verses from the Book of Isaiah in the Old Testament. "Rorate caeli desuper, et nubes pluant justum: aperiatur terra, et germinet Salvatore"² are the opening words of a text used in Catholic and, less frequently, Protestant liturgy. The verses give expression to the longings of Patriarchs and Prophets, and symbolically of the Church, for the coming of the Messiah. According to Jewish eschatology Messiah, the redeemer, the savior, is supposed to restore justice and to "raise the dead." The New Testament sees the Messianic fulfillment in Jesus.

The fragment from Isaiah's prophetic verses written over the landscape dotted with flowers, with a path leading deep into the perspective towards the horizon, seems as a hope against hope. The gloomy colour palette invigorated in the picture foreground with dabs of paint: the flowers, might seem as melancholic as ever. One never knows when prophesies are supposed to be fulfilled. It might also be that the painter, the artist, compares himself with a poet like

matérialité même, matière peut être pensée, à l'inverse, come une écriture ... il (Kiefer) écrit sur ses tableaux - il écrit la peinture. Son trait est une sort de marquage sur la peau de la matière picturale ... sur le corps de la peinture sont écrites des choses, ou des restes des choses, plus encore que les mots," Danièle Cohn in Anselm Kiefer, *Sternenfall*, Anselm Kiefer au Grand Palais, pp. 101-102

² Drop down ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness:

Let the earth open and bring forth a Saviour

Bachmann and a prophet like Isaiah, recurrently quoted by Kiefer.¹ For a painter taking up the role of an oracle of the things to come this is a means to express critique of the present.

Kiefer's landscapes appear as monochrome pictures representing wasteland, as dark regions of the collective and personal subconscious. These are ambiguous traumatic territories, where nothing is the way it appears to be on the surface. These sceneries do not reveal the inner logic of events, that inscribed themselves over the lands, they just carry the memory of suffering

. In the long run the landscapes coincide with the flat picture plane and the schematic transparent palette surface, the medium of artistic representation.

"Heavenly" Landscapes

In Kiefer's initial works the symbols of Christianity appeared in the claustrophobic, wooden interiors of the attic, as in the painting "Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost." From 2007 characters from Christian mythology started to dominate landscapes.

For example „Maria“ (1978-2008) is not a conventional representation of the Holy Mary in painting. Although not overtly iconoclastic, the representation of Maria is reduced by Kiefer to a translucent winged image. Except for her name and the wings all other attributes of Christianity are absent in the painting. One can compare Maria to the winged Nike, ancient Greek goddess of Victory, and simultaneously to a fallen angel. The motive of wings brings to memory the Nordic myth about Wayland as well as the myth of the falling Icarus. The ash-grey wings of "Maria" hover in the night sky over the dark landscapes of ferns and stones. She appears in Kiefer's recent paintings as a painter's guardian angel. "The angel as messenger, protector and helper of ... the painter and painting, is a phenomenon that occurs in many variants through the course of art history. On some early depictions of St. Luke (especially in the Byzantine East), he embodies the spirit of Christian inspiration. Then, where the Madonna acts as Luke's model, he occasionally enjoys the assistance of a companion angel, who grinds the pigment. In allegories of painting, the angel later cedes to Mercury, who in turn is replaced by the antique figures of Fama (fame) or the muse of history, Clio, while Minerva (Athena), equipped with the amulet of vanquished Medusa, vouches herself in

¹ e.g. Kiefer's book entitled „über euren Städten wird Gras wachsen,“ after Prophet Jesaja, (Grass will grow over your cities, Isaiah)

person for the wisdom of Painting."¹ "The Painter's Guardian Angel," (*Des Malers Schutzengel*) created in 1975 is related to the theme of "Maria". The picture represents a winged angel holding a semi-transparent palette. The painting is executed in rough brushstrokes with thick layers of oil on canvas. It recalls impressionist way of representation of figure against a landscape in rich vibrant colours on a canvas filled to the brim, like the works of Van Gogh, whom Kiefer admires. The purely optical variations of colour emphasise gradations of tones from dark earthly red to blue, pink and white. Dabs of paint spread all over the canvas conveying the dynamics of movement of the angel, shifts of direction and the volume. The mosaic of brushwork calls attention to the raw, chromatic colour variations causing a powerful visual experience. The distorted flat landscape with mountain serving as background behind the angel are adjusted to the two-dimensional surface pattern, accentuating the flat picture plane. The pigment dabs modelling and contouring the form create illusionist depth combined with the two-dimensional solidity of the semi-transparent palette. The transparency of the palette is symbolic: it thematises painting as the medium of reflection and imitation of the existing world and at the same time it ascribes to painting the ability of revealing the divine, enabling the spectator to see through, beneath the apparent medial surface. The presence of the angel hints at the possibility of divine, ultimate revelation. Revelation, the possibility to see through and understand the inner nature and purpose of painting, as well as the inner logic of the world is associated by Kiefer to the image of Maria. (*Pic. 27. Des Malers Schutzengel (The Painter's Guardian Angel), 1975, oil on canvas, 130 x 150, 5 cm, Collection A. and G. Gercken, Hamburg*)

If in Kiefer's previous works fire threatened to engulf the landscape, in more recent pictures it is reduced to flames. The sacred chairs burning with eternal flames in „Father, Son and the Holy Ghost“ painted in the 70-ies, are replaced in recent works by ash-colour rocks. Stones, rocks have from times immemorial symbolised “solidity, roughness and invariability of matter,”² emphasised by the painter within the context of Christian mythology rocks in their petrified purity might refer to other orders of existence. “Nothing is more noble and terrifying as a majestic rock ... nothing is as immediate and as autonomous in the fullness of its “power.” Stone *is* before everything else. It always remains the same, it has constancy ... A rock reveals to humans something that transcends their fragile existence: absolute being.”³ Certain rocks

¹ Jürgen Harten, Renata Sharp, Anselm Kiefer, p.70

² Mircea Eliade, *Die Religionen und das Heilige*, p. 251

³ Ibid

and stones have been worshipped from immemorial times since they were perceived to “represent *something other* than they actually were.”¹ The recurrence to obsolete, archaic forms of religious consciousness intrinsic to the dialectics of the spiritual, immediate and the absolute suggest imagery erased from “popular memory”² that only art might be able to mediate. As mentioned above themes of Virgin Mary and the saints have been subjects of painting for centuries. Their new interpretation by Anselm Kiefer proposes the revival of the old tradition yet in a way that draws the spectator further back to the very origins of religious experience deprived of the ritualistic ceremonial aspects but shifting the accent on the awe inspiring and the inexplicable.

For example the motive of rocks in pictures "Cherubim and Seraphim" 1983 and "Order of Angels" 1984-86. Chapter VII of Dionysus Areopagita's "Doctrine of the Celestial Hierarchy" translates seraphim as "the inflamer" or "kindler" and the cherub as the fullness of knowledge, outpouring of wisdom.³ The rocks in the painting: „Ich bin, der ich bin“ 2008 are surrounded with burning flames indicating the sacred-mysterious aspect of the rocks: "I am who I am, the secret per se."⁴ The triangular compositional shape refers to the triangle as the sign of the Holy Trinity: Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

(Lapis philosophorum *Lat.*) the so-called philosophers stone was considered by alchemists to be the symbol of wisdom. This legendary alchemical substance was believed to turn base metals especially lead into gold. In his representations of stones and rocks Kiefer invests his imagery with a diversity of meanings. Represented either as components of the Holy Trinity or as the symbols of wisdom venerated by alchemists the images of heavy rocks acquire for the contemporary spectator the connotation of some unchangeable petrified relics, symbols of purity, persistent in the collective unconscious. Repressed symbols that painting retrieves and makes visible.

In the painting "San Loretto" 2008 a solid rock with wings dominates the composition. The rock ascending against all laws of gravity is rendered as a miracle, that can be compared to the miracle of painting itself, implying rise of spirit embodied in the matter. The picture appeals to human faith in the wonder of ascent. The heavy solid rock appears illuminated with

¹ Ibid. p. 251

² Hal Foster, *Art since 1900*, p. 677

³ Jürgen Harten, Renata Sharp, Anselm Kiefer, p. 132

⁴ Anselm Kiefer, *Maria durch ein Dornwald ging*, Exhibition Catalogue, p. 128

a subdued silvery light. "San Loretto has always fascinated me very much. I saw it for the first time in a picture by Tiepolo, it is the church that flies from Jerusalem to San Loretto at night. This is, of course a wonderful idea, and a very modern one: a solid body which moves, dissolves, and reconstructs at some other place."¹

“According to a fifteenth-century legend, when the Virgin Mary's house in Nazareth came under threat by invading Saracen armies, it was miraculously transported in 1291 from the Holy Land to Loreto, a small town on Italy's Adriatic coast. Giambattista Tiepolo made a fresco related to this legend in approximately 1744, an illusionist fresco that covered the ceiling of the Scalzi church in Venice. The fresco was destroyed by bombing in World War I. Using an oval shape, Tiepolo painted the scene in three parts, depicting the figures in the lowest register in large scale and those near the top much smaller in size. This technique, called *di sotto in sù* (from below upward) gives the viewer the illusion that the scene is an extension of the space: the ceiling of the church opens up to reveal the events of the miracle.

The painting made in 2007 „Ave Maria“ takes its name from the initial words of the Lauteran Litany.² "Ave Maria" is the traditional Catholic prayer asking for the intercession of the Virgin Mary. The prayer is used within Roman Catholicism and is the basis of the Rosary (Lat. rose garden). The term "Rosary" denotes both a set of prayer beads and the devotional prayer itself that combines vocal or silent prayer and meditation on the lives of Virgin Mary and Jesus. The dark surface of the picture is rough due to the thick layers of pigment applied to it. The white ashen garment that symbolises Holy Mary, is rendered as the aspect of purity against the clay-coloured background. The motive of the ashen dress in „Ave Maria“ reminds the ashen garments of Lilith. Yet unlike Lilith, Holy Mary in the painting appears nearer to the spectator, she belongs both to the earthly and to the celestial, but she is not exiled beyond time and space, Holy Mary is the motherly, the pure, that combines the divine and the humane. She is the one who descends on earth to protect. The warm colour palette is inviting, it suggests the traditional virtues of “faith, hope, love” (Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe) emphasised by Kiefer in his earlier work. Maria's dress is suspended over the earth, rendered as the surface of rosy cracked clay, which might literally imply the rose garden of the Rosary. As in other pictures dedicated to Virgin Mary withered roses are attached to canvas. Maria is not the mother of

¹ Interview with Kiefer in Anselm Kiefer, *Maria durch ein Dornwald ging*, p. 126

² Mater castissima, Mater inviolata, Mater intemerata, Mater amabilis, Mater admirabilis, Mater boni consilii ... Turris eburnea“ (most chaste mother, unharmed mother, immaculate mother, amiable mother, most admirable mother, mother of good advice), text from a Catholic hymn, Anselm Kiefer, in *Maria durch ein Dornwald ging*, p. 117

melancholy and lead, but the „mother of good advice,“ as is mentioned in the religious hymn. Holy Mary's purity corresponds for Kiefer with the holiness and purity of painting itself that is supposed to give hope.

The painting „Maria durch ein Dornwald ging,“¹ /Mary Went through the Wood of Thorn/, 2007 takes its name from the initial strophe of a popular Christmas song dating back to the 16th century, about Mary carrying her child “under her heart” (unter ihrem Herzen) as she goes through the wood. The Holy Mary herself is not represented, the painting is rendered in dark, sombre tones, with very little light coming from the path in the right part of the picture. It is as if she already left and the earth retained the vague light of her presence. Maria is compared to mother nature that brings life, carries the child, the Saviour into the world. Dried plants, brambles, plaster, resin-coated ferns and clay mounted on canvas represent the forest that according to the song was withered and lifeless, but after Maria's presence roses covered the dried branches. The dense layer of dried plants on canvas creates the illusion of the passage through such a forest almost impossible. Going through it appears to be a miracle. Mary's miraculous way might indicate the way for the spectators, that painting makes visible: the way from darkness to light, to life. Holy Mary might have her own “ways of wisdom,” those of, for example, silent religious hope, that contemporary civilisation might render obsolete, but that the painter wishes to stress by referring to the old song. The mysterious darkness of the “Dornwald” indicates the primordial forces of nature that through the presence of Holy Mary are stripped of their violent character and rendered peaceful.

The wide-spread wings of Virgin Mary crown the landscape of rocks in “Regina im caelum assumpta.” Maria, Mater Dei, is referred to here as the Queen of Heaven, that according to the Catholic teaching, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory upon the end of her earthly life. Kiefer compares her in the picture with the reign of heavens and the mother of art, painting, representing her as the palette with wings. Her ascent is rendered as the triumph over the grey landscape of rocks. The flames lining the wings illuminate the painting. They shed mysterious light onto the rocks below under the ascending palette, that appears to animate the inanimate by the miracle of painting. The site is rendered as some archaic place, back in the times when rocks were treated as sacred due to the spiritual power which they were believed to represent.² Painting is presented here as the divine aspect, with Virgin Mary as the source of

¹ “Mary went through the wood of thorn”, the title to a German song to Mary

² Mircea Eliade, *Die Religion und das Heilige*, p. 255

inspiration and the patron of art reigning over the landscape. The rounded form of the palette that corresponds to the female aspect in Christian mythology, the Holy Mary, relates to the earthly realm. The strictly geometric, rectangular form of the medial support contradicts the rounded form of the palette, creating the tension between the two orders: the higher order of rationality that threatens the rounded contours of the lower earthly realm. Painting symbolised by Holy Mary remains for a painter the divine aspect that enlightens and nurtures. It impregnates with life. Virgin Mary's sombre heavenly triumph is rendered by Kiefer in monochrome colour palette of grey, with thick layers of pigment applied to canvas. (*Pic. 28. Regina im caelum assumpta, 1977-2008, oil, emulsion, acrylic, shellac on canvas, 380 x 330 cm*)

The motive of a palette with wings reappears in the painting "Maria." Kiefer accentuates here the very act of painting, by emphasising the rough bold brushwork "raining" upon the earth, the thick layers of pigment applied to the canvas - the winged palette is pouring colour onto the dark petrified earth as if blessing, impregnating it with new life. Kiefer here imitates the process of painting, which in itself is the imitation of nature. The motive of a transparent palette raining upon the earth first appeared in Kiefer's picture "To Paint," 1979. The motive of rain as the symbol of impregnation goes back to the Greek mythology: the myth of Zeus, the main deity of the Greek pantheon impregnating Danae with the golden rain, is interpreted by Kiefer as art impregnating the world with the holy rain of regeneration.

The recurrent motive of wing in Kiefer's work appeared as early as 1982 in the painting "Wayland's Song" (with Wing). The heavy lead wing hovers in the picture menacingly over the straw covered abstract landscape. Wayland, the master-smith of Edda, was famous for his workmanship. He was purposefully crippled by the king of Sweden, who thus planned to retain him at his court and to force him forge treasures. But Wayland got his revenge on the king, by murdering his sons and presenting him with cups made from their skulls and by raping the king's daughter. After this Wayland forged wings with which he escaped leaving the earth behind.¹ Making this myth the subject of his painting Kiefer analyses the nature of art and of artist: art as an iconoclastic activity, a revolt against the arbitrary power. The lead wing manifests the promise of artistic freedom for which any means according to the myth are justified. For those who would not create in captivity violence is not an obstacle. The moral dilemma however for an artist remains unresolved. The question of who and why should set

¹ Mark Rosenthal, Anselm Kiefer, p. 89

limits to artistic creativity of if moral standards are applicable to those of art. Like the palette, the wing as the symbol of freedom is a significant motive in Kiefer's work. Art for an artist overshadows conventional tastes, attitudes and is free from any didactic or even moral tasks.

In *"Das Wölund-Lied"* the lead wing attracts major attention of the spectator compositionally: it is superimposed upon a landscape and is centred. The wing is supported by the lead strips stretched over the canvas like chains, not allowing it to soar to the sky. The layers of oil, straw, emulsion and a lead object make up the rough surface of the painting. In spite of the schematically outlined depth of the perspective, the picture with objects attached to it appears flat and two-dimensional. In another version of *"Wayland's Song"* (with tongs), 1982, a metal grid, two planks forming an angle at the right edge of the painting and three blacksmith tongs are attached to the horizontal plank. Kiefer experiments in this picture with the painterly medium emphasising the medial support, the rough uneven surface with ready-made objects attached to it. It is not the landscape with the furrows disappearing in the distance that catches the attention, but the painted surface as a whole, with pigments of black and white colour applied in a gestural manner. The metal grid might indicate Wayland's captivity, subtly compared by the painter to an artist's ideological captivity within historical perspective. The reference to the motives from Germanic mythology is not incidental. It is purposefully chosen by the artist to restore the images from the mythology repressed in collective memory after its ideological use by the Nazi regime. One is invited to question among others the socio-historical ramifications of such use as well as the issues of artistic subjectivity defined via these myths. The tongs - blacksmith's work instruments appear as those intended for torture. Wayland's story has been generalised by Kiefer in these two paintings as the example of opposition of artistic freedom versus authoritarian power. An example that sets the paradigm of violence perpetuated in myth, with its inevitable return.¹ (*Pic. 29. Das Wölund-Lied (Wayland's Song), 1982, 280 x 380 cm, oil, emulsion, straw, photo on projection paper on canvas, with applied lead wings with stripes, up right inscribed "Das Wölund-Lied," Collection Doris and Charles Saatchi, London*)

Like Wayland who forged his wings to get free from servitude on earth, Icarus wanted to soar up to the sun with his wings of wax to be equal with gods. In both myths the motive of wing is essential for the artist. The painting *„Icarus – March Sand“* analyses the divine aspect of art combined with its iconoclastic potential to revolt. Using pictorial means Kiefer transforms his

¹ Mircea Eliade, *Die Religion und das Heilige*, p. 447

sand painting into an allegorical "event of painting."¹ The stages of its making are made obvious: one can discern the layers making up the medial support - the photopaper on canvas, with visible traces of application of oil, emulsion and sand to the surface. The various layers of matter applied to the medial support make visible the artistic work process influenced by the rules of the medium itself as Clement Greenberg analysed. "According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Daedalus, an Athenian smith, wanted to liberate himself and his son, Icarus, from captivity in Crete, using wings that he had made for each. Icarus took the risk to fly close to the sun, so that the wax by which the wings were secured to his shoulders, melted; he plummeted into the sea."²

According to the myth the skill of craftsmanship, art in fact, was supposed to enable humans break the established order of things, to revolt, to make it possible to soar up to the skies and become equal to gods. In Kiefer's painting the black wing of Icarus is painted over a burning landscape. It is not clear if the sun above, or the flames below cause Icarus's fall. Although Icarus with a palette is a character from the Greek mythology, his role in this painting is simultaneously related to the historical events that took place on German land. The burning landscape is the topos of the war, that caused the devastation of the various provinces of German land, consequently turning them into a desert of sand. The painting is based on a photograph onto which layers of colour pigment, sand and emulsion are imposed. The landscape itself is overshadowed by the flames of all-consuming fire and the dark wing. The destruction of the landscape's original harmony is visually achieved by application of sand to the photograph and by painting the winged palette over it. The depth of the perspective, the three-dimensionality, the illusion of the recess is violated by the wing holding the palette, painted over the landscape in bold brushwork. Kiefer takes up the role of Icarus, representing his art as if soaring high up over the burning land. The palette carried by the wing of Ikarus, is however doomed to failure.

Painting symbolised by a palette, by the wing or by sheer abstraction on canvas is thematised in Kiefer's pictures within the context of ancient Greek, Nordic, Kabbalistic or Christian mythologies. These pictures are semantic landscapes, charged with historical and mythological meanings, rendered by formal means evident in the technique of the execution of the paintings, application of various layers of matter onto medial support and in the

¹ Jürgen Harten, Renata Sharp, Anselm Kiefer, Dusseldorf, p. 100

² Ibid.

composition. The palette and wing motives that constantly appear in Kiefer's works from early 70-ies up to 2008 have been some of the major motives in his landscapes, books and sculptures.

Chapter III

Seascapes

Exile

Anselm Kiefer made the following comment on Louis-Ferdinand Céline's novel "Voyage au bout de la nuit": "In fact in this book everything goes from bad to worse and when the worst ends, the other 'worst' begins. I like this book a lot for this inverted eschatology. It leads us not to the paradise but hell."¹

In his cycle of paintings "Voyage au bout de la nuit" 2006, (Voyage to the end of night) the aspect of hope and progress is replaced by eternal exile, by the sense of extreme despair, alienation, disorientation. With the composition including thirty paintings, each 190 x 330 cm, that trace the odyssey of a small lead boat in the stormy waters of nowhere, landscapes are replaced by marine views. The whole cycle has a narrative, almost filmic character, it focuses on particular episodes of a naval odyssey in a strictly ordered sequence of paintings. There is no word or sign of comfort except for the endless night. The repetitive seascapes are monotonous, offering no prospect and no progress. The paintings from the cycle "Voyage au bout de la nuit" purposefully render a claustrophobic, gloomy atmosphere. They offer no escape for the small boat engulfed in the stormy waves. Unlike Kiefer's landscape paintings, in the seascapes there is no perspective. The vast realm of water sometimes fills the canvas, sometimes merges with the thin line of the murky sky making a monotonous depressive background of endless abstract water surfaces, that repeat from one picture to another till the very end. The "Voyage" comprising thirty separate paintings records thirty episodes of an exile in timeless wandering. The obscure light reflected by the waves does not indicate, whether it's day or night, one cannot tell the time or place. Conventional signs of civilisation disappear beneath the rough waves. Kiefer's "Voyage au bout de la nuit" is related to the novel of the same title by the French writer Louis-Ferdinand Céline. It was published in France in 1932 and is partly autobiographical. Ferdinand Bardamu, the novel's main protagonist tells the story of his life: his experiences during the war, his stay in Africa and in America. The book thematises death and suffering as the major experiences of Bardamu wherever he stays. Each

¹ En effet, dans ce livre, tout va de mal en pis et quand le pire advient, un autre "pire" s'annonce. J'aime beaucoup ce livre en raison de cette eschatologie inversée. Il nous conduit non pas au paradis mais en enfer. Anselm Kiefer in *Sternenfall*, Anselm Kiefer au Grand Palais, p.113

episode of his life is characterised by failure and stagnation. "The novel depicts a number of new beginnings, fresh starts, which however end up in the experience of failure. Here as well dominates stagnation, circle as the basic form of experience, as the basic pattern of hopeless existence."¹ Kiefer renders Céline's protagonist, a disoriented wanderer, as a boat in the open sea. Like the novel, Kiefer's cycle of paintings demonstrates stagnation, the position of the boat does not change from one work to the other, what appears as progress at first glance, is in fact disorientation and regress, that make the vessel a synonym for existential hopelessness. "Each book is a voyage when one follows its narrative or discursive rhythm."² Céline's book and Kiefer's paintings dedicated to it render a voyage that reminds us of death. These paintings imbued with mysterious light, the source of which remains hidden, like the purpose of the voyage itself, convey a monotonous hypnotic feeling that verges on the ecstatic. The water surfaces sprinkled with light, convey a semblance of hope against hope. "Thoughts of death are subdued by a certain sign of comfort. ... By Light ... Exactly like sound and smell, light is also an aspect of nature, that never remains outside our body and reminds us of our disappearance. Light flows into us constantly through our eyes, being the principle of our consciousness and of the inviolability of our existence. To really see - and always to see only - means to be free from time and mortality at least for a while. Thus we are not on a voyage at all. Voyages have the beginning and the end, but paralysed by light, we do not differentiate the beginning from the end. These are for us absurd ideas."³ Kiefer's repetitive motive of the lost vessel on its meaningless "voyage" corresponds in Céline's novel to the meaninglessness of human existence, which in painting is depicted as a universal experience. The destiny of each singular individual, the same way as the destiny of mankind in history, is thematised as the way "from bad to worse," a progress in time that results in the regress of moral, in corruption, in suffering. Failure, error, purposelessness are demonstrated not as private experiences of Céline's protagonist but are depicted as inevitable for all human endeavours irrespective of time or place. (*Pic. 30. Voyage au bout de la nuit, 2006, mixed media, each painting 190 x 330 cm, composition of 30 paintings*)

Ferdinand Céline had a controversial history of reception, which was partly due to certain facts from the writer's biography. When it became known that Céline wrote anti-Semitic and

¹ Margarete Zimmerman, Unmöglich, Céline nicht zu lesen. Über voyage au bout de la nuit". In: AKZENTE, October, 1982, p. 411, cited after Cordula Meier, Anselm Kiefer, Die Rückkehr des Mythos in der Kunst, p. 194

² Peter Schjeldahl in Anselm Kiefer, Bücher, 1969-1990, p. 20

³ Ibid. p. 22

antidemocratic pamphlets in 1936-1941, he had to flee to Germany. Paying tribute to Céline's novel in painting might be interpreted as an attempt to separate the writer's biography from his body of work. There is the evident concern with the ethical and with the subjective against the violent course of history.

Kiefer in his series of paintings dedicated to Céline's novel does not make evident his attitude to the writer's biographical choices. It is important for the painter to demonstrate how word can be translated into image to convey the profound sense of suffering, disillusionment and despair as a universal human experience. The vessel desperately seeking its destination can be compared to an artist in hopeless search of the meaning and purpose of his art in a world that is profoundly barbaric. Anselm Kiefer who translates literary images into visual ones, analyses the process of creative work itself as a desperate voyage. Art although it can demonstrate the sufferings and inequities of the world, can do nothing to prevent them. The greatest works of literature or painting that express the tragedy of human condition exist side by side with corruption, violence, injustice. Although capable of profound emotional experience, work of art is not able to affect the ways of historical developments, which always turn out to be heading towards the tragic end. The boat attached to the canvas in "Voyage au bout de la nuit" reminds the motive of the vessel from Kiefer's earlier "Operation Sea-lion," depicting the Nazi military manoeuvres. The same motive of a lead boat attached to the canvas reappears in the homages to Paul Celan, and symbolises the Kabbalistic heavenly vessel, the chariot in the painting "Merkaba" from 2002.

The lead boat appears in Kiefer's works as a complex, semantically charged object, that supposes the complexity itself, the inner polarity of the themes that it accommodates. Apparently similar objects that in each Kiefer's work acquire a different meaning, demonstrate the general relativity of such notions as right or wrong, positive or negative, showing that there is not one single way of judging a work of art, a particular artist or of the phenomena to which a work of art is related. Different sub-meanings and sub-contexts attributed to the themes addressed by Kiefer materially correspond in his paintings to their palimpsest-like texture, to the layers of matter attached to the medial surface: e.g. emulsion, lead, oil, acrylic, shellac, lead objects on canvas.

Kiefer's "Voyage..." conveys the unchangeable state of estrangement and exile, arbitrarily

divided into certain isolated episodes disconnected from one another by the spaces between the paintings on the wall. The pictures convey the constant search for the meaning and the role of art by someone, who realises the meaninglessness of such search, or one's inability to change anything. The frustrated state of an artist, a writer or a protagonist is reduced to the meaningless insignificance of a boat at the mercy of powers, of nature or of history, that are out of one's control. The paintings of the "Voyage" articulate the sense of incompatibility of the small boat for the task of accomplishing its voyage, which corresponds to the incompatibility of the artist to the task of accomplishing the artistic goal. This inadequacy for the task, the incompatibility is repeatedly intensified by the tiny size of the boat as compared to the overwhelming dimensions of the surrounding seas. "The end of night" that is synonymous to a dead-end appears as the inevitable fate of all human endeavours including artistic ones, irrespective of the original plans, geographical destinations or historical circumstances.

In Kiefer's seascapes waters merge with heavens forming a vast, cosmic realm without borders. Such spaces appeared in his art as early as 1975, e.g. the watercolours: "Essenz/Existenz," 1975, or "Heaven on Earth," 1974-75. In "Essenz/Existenz" the colours are light, the heavens above are almost the same tone as the waters below. The distant mountains are a picturesque backdrop. The reflections of the skies, the emphasis on the water as one of the life-giving sources of the four elements, water as one of the aggregate states, the origin of organic life makes up the essence of the existence on earth. In the watercolour "Heaven on Earth" there is the same motive of the sky reflected in the waters. The appearance of heavens descending on earth is made possible due to the visual illusion of water surfaces reflecting the heavens. Like in "Voyage au bout de la nuit" Kiefer intentionally underpins the fusion of the two realms, making them appear boundless. In the earlier watercolours this is a hopeful union, the essence of existence, in "Voyage au bout de la nuit" however water appears to be the ultimate reality that underlies all manifestations of life, it is also the final destination that engulfs all.

Velimir Khlebnikov, Figures and Times

The cycle of paintings arranged in a composition "Velimir Khlebnikov" 2004, is dedicated to a Russian futurist, one of the prominent representatives of Russian avant-garde poetry. Velimir

Khlebnikov (1885-1922) experimented in his work with language, pushing to the limit the possibilities of linguistic expression. He analysed the abstractions of word and of figures, in the pursuit of universal algorithms that would allow to explain the course of history. The "laws of time", as he wrote, could be translated into the equations that according to Khlebnikov revealed the destiny of individuals as well as that of states or whole nations. These equations underlying the "laws of time" according to Khlebnikov explained the chronology of wars, the predestination of peoples in history, the decisive historical events in the past. He believed that his calculations would enable him to predict the future. "What interests Kiefer in Khlebnikov is the destiny of a failed prophet who would defy improbability and presage the future of wars with the aid of cryptic figures. ('The Elamites, Assyrians, Romans, Tatars, Germans - some of the most warlike species of man. The years in which their military glory reached its peak fit the points that form multiples of 317. ... In the light of these ... figures, the life of mankind is seen in terms of the work of a stream involving centuries. The nations describe a curve and the most acute peaks of the curve yield with the spaces between, a natural series of numbers; the essential difference between the Germans and the Mongols consisting basically in one's moustache drooping downwards while the other's is brushed upwards; and if so, so what? The Germans pursue their great struggle for the dominium mari, the rule of the seas, 317 x 2 years after the Mongols' magnificent struggle for the sea - Kubla Khan in 1281 and Tirpitz in 1915'."¹

Kiefer's composition "Velimir Khlebnikov" comprises some 30 paintings each 190 x 330 cm. He translates into painting the effort of a poet to rationalise history in terms of laws of time expressed in equations. The paintings with traces of scribbles of equations scattered over the picture surface reiterate the style of Khlebnikov's own writings about history explained away by numerological calculations. Kiefer dedicated to Khlebnikov books and paintings questioning the artist's ability to explain or "represent historical experience"² whether in visual images, words or mathematical equations. History appears calculable, but this appearance is illusory, its progress in Kiefer's paintings is rendered as stagnation articulated by the repetition of the similar motive.

"Velimir Khlebnikov" - the cycle comprising seascape paintings with a lead boat and dried

¹ Peter Urban's edition of Khlebnikov, Rowolt, quoted from Anselm Kiefer, Catalogue for the exhibition at the State Art Gallery, Dusseldorf, Jürgen Harten, Renata Sharp, p. 107

² Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, *Art since 1900*, p. 614

plants attached to the surface appears compositionally static. "The continuous visual trope"¹ employed by the artist here, that of the boat in the rough sea as the marine motives in German Romanticism with Caspar David Friedrich² refers to the themes from German cultural heritage. At the same time there's the attempt to draw a parallel to the universal historical experience made possible by means of painting with its references to poetry of e.g. Khlebnikov or to the prose of Celine as in "Voyage au bout de la nuit".

In the cycle of pictures entitled "Velimir Khlebnikov" the object attached to the flat two-dimensional canvas, the symbolic vessel, attempts to overcome stagnation in space and time. The pictures - a repetitive succession of instants within a bigger narrative sets a certain repetitive rhythm corresponding to that of a poem composed of one single word or to a repetitive cycle of years at the "curve" of history. Velimir Khlebnikov's poem "The Sea" actually described stormy water expanses revolting against the skies. Kiefer's sombre seascapes are arranged on the wall in a monotonous, uniform order, that is supposed to reiterate the rhythm of Khlebnikov's poetic language. It emphasises the monotonous unchanging pace of history, its repetitive, ruthless but predictable character and the human inability to change its course, stressed in Kiefer's composition for example by the impossibility of breaking the order of paintings set in a certain succession in the gallery space. These works are compositionally and thematically related to the abject disillusionment like in the "Voyage au bout de la nuit." The installation conveys the traumatic experience of human condition. Although apparently calculable with the help of equations as formulated by Khlebnikov, the violent course of history is rendered unchangeable. Therefore the ability to predict future does not help to prevent violence or to reveal its inner logic.

Apart from experimenting with numbers Khlebnikov together with futurist Aleksei Kruchenykh invented a qualitatively new poetic language. Khlebnikov's poetry is replete with nonsensical words and non-representational sounds or, in its written form, groups of letters. This method was termed "zaum" - an abbreviation of the Russian word "zaumnoe" (trans-rational). Arguing that the word as such directly affects our senses and has a meaning independently of its ascribed signification, they sought to bypass the rational use of language and underscored the phonetic materiality of linguistic utterances.³ Allusions to Khlebnikov

¹ Ibid. 615

² Ibid.

³ Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin h. d. Buchloh, Art since 1900, p. 689

who stressed the “beyond rationality” aspect in language render the world in Kiefer's paintings also as trans- rational, nonsensical and almost non-representational. Both language and painting appear beyond rational explanation or purpose. Kiefer's composition with its intensified repetition, the serial principle, in which all parts are fragments within a thematically defined narrative raises the issue of traumatised, divided subjectivity at odds with self. (Pic. 31. *Velimir Khlebnikov, 2004, mixed media, each painting 190 x 330 cm, composition of 30 paintings*)

In his paintings Kiefer questions the methods that poets and Cabbalists in the past implemented in their attempt to discover and to explain universal phenomena. Kabbala mystics used letter combinations to interpret the language of the Holy Scripture in order to discover the hidden divine wisdom and to make prophesies. Futurist poet Khlebnikov experimented with numbers and equations in the attempt to see into the future. According to his theory the dates of the past wars could be combined in a certain way to calculate the dates of the wars in future. Anselm Kiefer dedicated paintings and installations to both Khlebnikov and the Kabbalists. These works reflect the contexts in which the artist is now, looking back from his historical experience at the poetic and philosophical attempts to deal with history. For example Kiefer's seven art books titled „Velimir Khlebnikov – Zeit, Maß der Welt“ dedicated to the poet, who made prophesies of his own by means of meticulous numerological calculations, as if imitating the ancient Kabbala tradition. In Kiefer's painting „For Khlebnikov“ 1984-86 there are lead stones, a small lead airplane and steel ropes stretched across the abstract canvas. One can decipher inscriptions of the Sefirot names on the picture surface. Kiefer draws a parallel between the attempts of the Kabbala prophets to unravel the mysteries of future and the numerological experiments of Khlebnikov. Kiefer's works dedicated to Khlebnikov translate the language of poetry into painting. For Kiefer it is painting that is supposed to carry the prophetic and the explanatory message regarding history.

On the other hand his paintings convey the melancholic idea of impossibility of understanding the ultimate purpose of history and the impossibility to predict or to calculate. The Sefirot names although written in Latin over the canvases do not reveal much about what they mean. The viewer might guess, what each of them implies but it would not help to understand the Sephirot's real entity. The same can be said about Khlebnikov. His method is

rendered in the painting obscure, the scribbles and the equations are hardly decipherable on canvas. History therefore appears allegorically in Kiefer's work as a war wreckage attached to the canvas, a burden that finally occupies the imagination of the viewer.

Judging by the gloomy colour palette, the prevalence of lead against the background of a deserted landscape Kiefer denies any positive interpretation of history. For him a historical process can be translated into a dark landscape serving as a scenery for wars with remnants of military machines left over. According to Daniel Arasse, Kiefer expressed here the denial of the teleological concept of history. The works dedicated to Khlebnikov question the conventional idea about history as an uninterrupted linear movement towards ultimate progress and perfection of the spirit. Presentation of history as a continuous movement towards progress was characteristic for the Christian doctrine, as well as for the Enlightenment movement and for the philosophy of Fichte and Hegel, that in the long run legitimised the modern, messianic aspirations of the National-Socialism. In the light of such interpretation of history even wars are viewed as legitimate means to achieve certain historical goals.¹ Kiefer's works speak on the contrary about the absence of any ultimate meaning („Entgleiten von Sinn“) in history. The strong material presence of his paintings, books, installations or sculptures impresses the viewer with monumental dimensions, theatricality, rough structure, immediate palpable presence. In a certain way the artist explores here the boundaries and possibilities of artistic representation. Yet in spite of the fact that these works emotionally affect with their sheer material presence, they are unable to convey the inner essence of historical processes. Moreover they indicate the sense of exile, loss, fracture, the absence of meaning as well as the impossibility of its representation.² In the cycle of paintings dedicated to Khlebnikov the mysterious obscure light reappears as a transient sign of comfort, it rather accentuates the gloominess of the surrounding seascape rather than brings light and clarity. This light "comes perhaps from under the water and ... sprinkles the water surface, that one sees, when one goes down and drowns, confusion reigns down in the sea depths. This is the realm of confusion. What did you expect? Where did you think, you were going to? Where did you think you were?"³ Confusion, vagueness threatening with the final death as the notions opposite to the sense of clarity, calculable precision that Khlebnikov thought to introduce into our perception of the world's history, appear to be the basic characteristics of

¹ Daniel Arasse, Anselm Kiefer, p. 210

² Ibid. pp. 220-221

³ Peter Schjeldahl in Anselm Kiefer, Bücher, 1969-1990, p. 23

the historical process, which is represented as an aspect beyond understanding and beyond explanation.

Hoffmann von Fallersleben

In his painting "Hoffmann von Fallersleben in Helgoland" 1983-86, a lead boat is applied to a canvas representing a seascape. Here like in the "Voyage au bout de la nuit" cycle the motive of a boat expresses the fate of exile and persecution to which an artist is destined. German poet Hoffmann von Fallersleben (1798-1874) spent his life in exile. After a successful career as librarian and professor of German language he was deprived of his chair as a consequence of the "Unpolitische Lieder" (Unpolitical Songs) written in 1840-41, in which he criticised the authorities of Prussia. He was persecuted by the Prussian authorities and during his exile lived in various places in Germany including the remote North Sea island of Helgoland where he wrote "Das Lied des Deutschen" (The Song of the Germans). The poem later became the national anthem of Germany. During the NS rule only the first verse of the poem which starts with the words "Deutschland, Deutschland über alles" (Germany, Germany above all) was used as the anthem. After the fall of the NS regime and up to now it has been decided to use the third verse of the poem in the current German state anthem. For Kiefer Hoffmann von Fallersleben like Ferdinand Céline is a controversial figure, therefore both are rendered with the same motive of boat lost at merciless sea. The goal of Hoffmann von Fallersleben was to reunite Germany which was in his lifetime divided into small principalities. Hoffmann von Fallersleben was known for his hatred towards the French and for his anti-Semitism. The boat lost at sea both in Kiefer's painting dedicated to the German poet as well as to the French writer Céline in "Voyage to the End of Night" communicates the sense of alienation, exile as the unchangeable fate of each artist. It also communicates the difficulties one experiences in accepting the heritage of artists from the previous epochs due to controversial details from their life and work. The same applies to Heinrich von Kleist. He was infamous for francophobie that was particularly evident in his drama "Hermannschlacht." His literary oeuvre was politically related to the time of Napoleon's occupations. National-Socialists in their turn enhanced this pathos of racial hatred driving it, this time, into the anti-Semitism.¹

The motive of a seascape with a polyhedron appears in Kiefer's paintings "Am Anfang" (In

¹ Sabine Schütz, Anselm Kiefer, Geschichte als Material, Arbeiten 1969-1983, pp. 234-5

the Beginning), 2003 and in "Melancholia," 2004. In these pictures a three-dimensional geometric form hovers over a vast desolate water space. The seascape suggests here visualisation of a creation story described in the first verses of Genesis: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the waters." The motive of polyhedron over the seascape in Kiefer's picture is a visual reference to Albrecht Durer's "Melancholia I" of 1514, an engraving that depicts an angel surrounded by symbolic objects including a polyhedron. In both paintings "Am Anfang" and in "Melancholia" Kiefer pits the rational architecture of the mind against the potentially unformed nature of cosmos.¹

In the painting "Ash Flower," 2004, the dark water of the sea visually corresponds to the dark cloud of the "Ash Flower" above. The title alludes to the poem of Paul Celan. Like in the paintings "Melancholia" and "Am Anfang" there is a geometric form in the upper part of the canvas over the sea level. The contradiction of the irrational depths of the dark water below against the geometric structure above, emphasises the opposition of the rational and the irrational aspects of an artistic process both in poetry or in painting. The artist counterpoints here two orders - the rational geometric order that is incompatible, threatening and alien to earthly human experiences. There is no communication between the two, these are two different realms. The higher order represented by the strict contours of the geometric structure threatens to divide and to split into separate pieces the flowing form of the "Ash Flower" in the background. The sea in the picture symbolises the primal source of life where all forms are present at their initial, formless stage, and into which all these return after death² like the "ash flower."

In the painting "The Red Sea" 1984-85 the actual sea is reduced to the red-coloured liquid in a bath tub - an object that Kiefer purposefully introduces into his paintings due to its historical and artistic connotations. What at first glance appears to be a neutral object of household - a bath tub, a vessel - was first appropriated by artist Joseph Beuys as a symbol of "wound," whereas Diether Roth with his "Badewanne von 'Ludwig van'" (Bath tub of 'Ludwig van') demonstrated with his zinc bath tub filled with sixteen Beethoven heads made of white sugar, brown chocolate and grease the cult figure of German music degraded into a consumer kitsch

¹ Michael Auping, Anselm Kiefer, Heaven and Earth, p. 134

² Mircea Eliade, Die Religion und das Heilige, p. 221-226

object.¹ However the main reason why Kiefer chose the motive of a bath tub to indicate the sea in his works is due to the fact that this object carries the "memory" of the Third Reich. From 1930 to 1940 the National-Socialist party distributed similar bath tubs to each German household, in order to guarantee the daily hygiene of the German nation ... Further on, a bath tub reminds in Kiefer's "Operation Sea-Lion" of the fascist rule, due to the fact that Hitler's generals prepared their assault on Great Britain using according to the national, military tradition small battle ship models in bath-tubs.²

The motive of the Red Sea is also Biblically associated with demonic Lilith, who was destined for eternal exile. Lilith, the first wife of Adam, fled from him to the shores of the Red Sea. The image of this mythical demonic character from Kabbala mysticism symbolises in Kiefer's works the tragedy of Shoah. Lilith personifies in Kiefer's works not only Jewish womanhood but the Jewish nation as a whole, the victim of the murderous regime, uprooted and destined to eternal exile. "Lilith at the Red Sea," a lead painting made in 1990, thematises the topic of the Holocaust by representing the sense of exile, chaos and dispersion. The painting is made up of ash covered archaic garments with patches of black hair and rough sheets of lead attached to a monumental canvas - 280 x 625 cm. The scale of the human catastrophe is rendered through the scale of the painting. The threatening depths of the stormy sea rendered as greyish sheets of lead are the last refuge of Lilith and the nation symbolised by her. Ash, patches of black hair and remnants of clothes create the impression of the bodily rests of the anonymous victims, who did not survive the barbarism of history and for whom the Red Sea bed became the ultimate deathbed. The ash-covered clothes that are significantly smaller in dimension than the menacing lead waves intensify the effect of human suffering and inevitable death. Kiefer combines in the painting the theme of the Biblical exile with the actual exile, murder and persecution of Jews during fascism, creating a powerful image of continuous suffering as the basic theme of both archaic mythology and the latest history. Irrational demonic violence and the innocence of the victim both ascribed to Lilith by Kiefer are the two poles of this complicated character, rendered in the painting through the violent forms of the huge rough sheets of lead that are incompatible in size with the tiny, innocently white, ash-smearred garments scattered all over the canvas. The rounded forms of the garments that are identified with female body stand in contrast to the rough, angular, pointed lead sheets. The rough, monumental materiality of lead crushes the fragile female forms related to

¹ Armin Zweite, Anselm Kiefer. Zweistromland

² Daniel Arasse, Anselm Kiefer, p. 79

the victimised femininity, that looks unprotected and engulfed by the grey-blue "sea" of lead. The inscription "Lilith am Roten Meer" appears like a scar made by the pointed lead over the medial surface, simultaneously symbolising the victim's body, whereas the patch of black hair on one of the dresses articulates the disintegration and continuous disappearance of bodily aspects in the course of time. (*Pic. 32. Lilith at the Red Sea, 1990, 280 x 625 cm, lead, emulsion, dresses and ash on canvas, up in the middle inscription "Lilith am Roten Meer", Collection Erich Marx, Berlin*)

In the seascape "Ave Maria," 1977-2007, the vast ash grey expanse of the sea that merges at the horizon with the sky, suggests a cosmic space that might have preceded creation or followed the world flood, eliminating all signs of civilisation. The sea is calm, emitting subdued grey light. Holy Mary symbolised by a palette with wings appears like a sacred spirit hovering over the waters. The wings dominate the painting, they occupy the whole upper part of the canvas reaching out to its very edges. Painted against the homogeneous backdrop of the sea, the wings appear like a relief, imbued with heaviness and volume. "Ave Maria" - the initial words of the Latin prayer to Mary, the words from the Lauretan Litany give hope, pronounced over the otherwise hopeless endless expanse of water under the dark ash-grey sky. The holiness of Mary corresponds here to the purity and holiness of art itself, that like Phoenix spreads its wings from the world ash.

Chapter IV

Books

Die Lesbarkeit der Welt¹

"Book represents sixty percent of my work. I produce a lot of books, but these are unique items, not publications. In terms of time manifestation, book has always attracted me with its difference related to time: first of all the time necessary for someone who reads it, page after page; secondly the time during which the audience turns the pages, it is engulfed in the time of the book. Whereas the painting is seen: one enters the hall, one sees it, one has it immediately in front of the eyes, one stops for a while to understand it better or to penetrate it, but one does not have to follow the whole process in time. This is the difference between a book and a painting."² There is the time that determines the existence of the spectator outside the world of the book - the historical time and there is the time of the book that runs parallel to historical time but does not necessarily coincide with it. The cultural time (*Eigenzeit der Kultur*) relates to the world of human beings, that exists outside the universal time of nature. Time as the transcendental, mega-signification exists outside the time of culture: the time of books, machines, human beings. The historical time of mankind is "the written world" (*Eingeschriebene Welt*, Vilém Flusser) the world that is recorded in writing.

Kiefer's art books, made of pictures and of fragments of written texts, are the microcosm that correspond to the macrocosm of the really existing world with its history, knowledge, mythology. In his books Kiefer analyses motives from German history and mythology in various media: language, photography, painting.

In some of his uniquely fabricated art books Kiefer thematises the medium of book in its extremely reduced form - an artificial book with blank, cauterised pages or pages of lead. His books with photos of corroded architectures on lead, of deserted landscapes, views of cities from above, books containing flowers with traces of pigment, books with plants, women hair or inorganic matter applied to pages analyse the medium which is physically present. The

¹ Zdenek Felix after Hans Blumenberg's book of the same title in Anselm Kiefer, *Bücher*, 1969-1990, p. 34

² Le livre représente 60% de mon travail. Je réalise beaucoup de livres, mais ce sont des exemplaires uniques, non des publications. En tant que manifestation du temps, le livre m'a toujours attiré, avec ses différentes temporalités: d'abord le temps nécessaire pour celui qui écrit, page après page; un autre ensuite pour le public, qui tourne les pages, qui est dans le temps du livre. Tandis qu'un tableau, ça surgit: on entre dans une salle, on le voit, on l'a immédiatement sous les yeux, on s'attarde peut-être un peu pour le comprendre mieux ou pour s'en pénétrer, mais on n'est pas tenu de suivre tout un processus temporel. Telle est la différence entre un livre et un tableau. Anselm Kiefer in *Sternenfall*, Anselm Kiefer au Grand Palais, p. 95

artist makes special emphasis on the medial support, the technique of execution, the material applied in its raw form. On the other hand books reduced to black cauterised volumes reveal the medium that in its reductionist form, deprived of any text or representation, appears before the spectator identical with its message, like Malevich's "Black Square." Creating a unique art book Kiefer makes the medium itself, the book - his major subject matter, whereas the process of artistic work and the production of meaning are emphasised by formal means - the character of the medial support that bares traces of the artist's work, the colour, the materials applied onto the page surfaces. Written text is either reduced to quotations from poetry, proper names of persons and of places or is completely absent. By presenting a photo within a book format the artist compares the two media, exploring a mimetic image or an abstraction within the context of a book.

Armin Zweite wrote about the traditions of futurism, constructivism, dadaism and fluxus reflected in the mode of Kiefer's art books creation. The "tradition that goes on from e.g. 'La Poesie de Transsibérien et de la petite Jeanne de France' a Leporello with changing typography and arbitrarily set colours, made in 1913 by Sonia Delaunay and Blaise Cendrars, Marinetti's 'Parole de Libertà,' 1931/32 layed out in metal as 'librogetto' to the 'Big Book' a house book by Alison Knowles (1964), or the mould books (Schimmelbüchern) and literary sausages (Literaturwürsten) by Dieter Rot as well as material assemblages in book form by Wolf Vostell. One should also take into consideration for example Bernard Aubertin's 'Livre brûlé et à brûler' (1970), Gotthard Graubner's 'Sickerbuch' (1964), a "Bunker Book" by Milan Knizak (1963-70), 'Gummi-Bücher' (Rubber Books) by Dieter Krieg (1975-76) or the respective works from the phase 'I. Werksatz' (I Composition) by Franz Erhard Walther (1969), not to forget the walled with books 'Door to a Library' by Hubertus Gojowczyk or the shelves filled with volumes by Barbara and Gabriele Schmidt-Heins. The scope is extraordinarily diverse and was documented in a whole set of exhibitions particularly in the seventies."¹

Merkawa

The avant-garde artists saw their goal in searching radically new forms for art in order to make it viable for the future. By the innovative, radical form in which Kiefer renders his books, he like avant-gardists presents the medium that will enable the existence of book in

¹ Armin Zweite, Anselm Kiefer. Zweistromland, p. 77

future, after the catastrophes of history, recent or distant past. Kiefer does not believe in progress, or that art can bring about progress, instead he presents in the ruined, reductionist form what distinguishes art as art in any historical epoch. Some of his volumes remain forever closed in, with the surface of the pages covered with layers of colour pigment, emulsion or shellac that hide their inner core - the medial support beneath various layers of matter attached to the surface. It is impossible for the spectator to penetrate all these layers. Sometimes the blank empty page surface creates the effect of revelation of the medium itself deprived of the image, but this effect is illusory. The message of Kiefer's art books thematises art as the medium that is inaccessible for the profane world, mysterious and iconoclastic. The accent is made on the medium itself, on the formal characteristics of the work, on the traces of the artistic work process that brings into the discourse the author's subjectivity. Anselm Kiefer offers the spectator a look beyond the façade, beyond the conventional surface into the unknown, submedial space, hidden beneath. This opportunity promises to reveal the mechanism that operates behind the surface of the medium, the mechanism of history for example, yet this promise remains an illusion, because all that the spectator can see is the surface of, for example, canvases or book pages.

In the art book "Merkawa" made in 1996 the spectator sees a window that offers a look inside, into the hidden space beyond the conventional house façade. The strict, geometric grid of the window reminds Mondrian's austere, geometric square motives. The window is broken and reveals the dark threatening space hidden beneath the traditional medial surface: the façade of a photographed building glued to the page of the book. Art itself, reduced here to a schematic form of a black abstract book page, is thematised as the topos of divine revelation. The motive of a window, that Kiefer introduces here, as the means of offering a revelatory view is recurrent in the history of painting. Kiefer analyses art on the pages of his "Merkawa" book as the revelatory opening, the passage, the transition into the hidden, unknown, dark space operating beyond the conventional medial surface on which mimetic image is projected. In Kiefer's book "Merkawa" this surface, on which painting is painted, coincides with the page of the book, on which text is supposed to be written, and with the photograph of a façade of a building, that is historically charged.¹ One can discern here various superimposed layers out of which the medial support, the book, is composed of: photograph, dots of colour pigment

¹ According to the interpretation of this work by Michael Auping, the broken window pane in the "Merkawa" book symbolises the Nazi "Kristallnacht" (Night of Broken Glass) in Michael Auping, Anselm Kiefer, Heaven and Earth, p. 100

against the dark background, clothes and ash applied to the surface. One is invited to literally look into the actual depth of the book pages, see through the layers of applied colour pigment, patches of fabric, etc. on the medial surface. The spectator is thus supposed to "travel" into the black, gaping hole of the broken window, serving as the passage into the dark and the unknown. The Hebraic term "Merkawa" was used by the philosophers of the Cabbala to indicate divine travel, in figurative, philosophical sense meaning transition from the profane realm into the sacred. This passage was made possible by interpretative reading of the sacred book - the Hechalot - the name is inscribed on one of the pages of the "Merkawa" book. Thus Kiefer presents a book within a book: the pages of the "Hechalot" coincide with the pages of Kiefer's book "Merkawa," thus offering a passage "travel" from one book into the other, from painting to photography - from one medium into the other, hidden beneath the surface. Kiefer's "Merkawa" book attempts to gap the disparities in time - from the limited, historical time inscribed in book within the earthly realm to the transcendental universal time outside it. In "Merkawa" the book, symbolising the written world of humanity's cultural heritage, is compared to a transparent window leading beyond the surface into the depths. Some of the "Merkawa" pages contain photographs of dark holes on a paved road, these mysterious openings suggest passages running underground, hidden from the spectator's eye. The representations of these holes that are photographed and attached to the book pages, promise to make visible something inside, beneath the earth surface that in the book coincides with the surface of the page, something that the medium of photography within the book format is supposed to reveal. These gaping holes suggest "travel" underneath, into the dark, unknown, unreadable space that looms below. *(Pic.33. Merkawa, 1996, Book, 32 pages, mixed media, 104.5, 81.9 x 9.8 cm, bound volume)*

The Unspeakable, for Paul Celan

In his art books "Das Lied von der Zeder - für Paul Celan," (The Song of Cedar - for Paul Celan), "Paul Celan - Jakobs Himmlisches Blut Benedieiet von Äxten" (2005) (Paul Celan - Jakob's Heavenly Blood Blessed by Axes), "Wach im Zigeunerlager" (Awake in the Gypsy Camp) (2005) Anselm Kiefer combines the language of Paul Celan's poetry with representation. The pages of the books are semantically charged landscapes with integrated handwritten citations from poems. The inscriptions convey the sense of suffering that has inscribed itself upon these landscapes and contaminated their peaceful beauty, since Paul Celan's poetry is irrevocably connected to the Shoah. Paul Ansel, who later accepted the

literary name, Paul Celan, was born in 1920 in Romania. Celan - a German speaking Jew, whose parents died in the concentration camp, expressed his traumatic experiences in poetry, mostly written in German, his native language which turned into the language of murder.¹ He committed suicide in 1970. Kiefer's books that are related to Celan's poetry, have a palimpsest-like quality. They bear traces of fire and writing. Representing on their double pages winter landscapes with incorporated citations from Celan's poems, Kiefer creates the images of his native German landscapes,² turned into the landscapes of murder. Their apparent peace and innocence, emphasised by the white colour, is contaminated by the traumatic memories, that ruin the natural harmony by leaving a black pattern of writing. The element of writing, executed in charcoal, thus indicating the traces of all-consuming fire, disturbs the original peace of the sleeping winter fields and of the skies above them, since writing is alien to the photographed landscapes. The inscriptions made in the upper part of the photograph make the white sky seem clouded and gloomy, and although the written patterns disappear in the distance following the general line of the perspective, they seem as traces of violence arbitrarily imposed upon the land surface. The inscriptions deprive the sceneries of their original innocence and turn them into terrains of murder that has to be remembered. The line from Celan: "Meiner Mutter Haar ward nimmer weiß...", semantically opposes the whiteness of the snow-covered landscape. The inscriptions, at times hardly readable, disappearing in the vanishing point relate to the unspeakable aspect of death beyond representation or naming amid the landscapes distorted by traces of fire. On the other hand writing as the symbol of the word of God seems to redeem these landscapes from their murderous past, casting a shadow of spirit spelled out in language upon the land, deserted by God. Kiefer places his landscapes thematising Celan's poetry into the format of an art book, that corresponds to a book of poetry as well as to the sacred notion of the book in Kabbala mysticism. The Second Commandment of the Old Testament determines representational impossibility a priori. Words are in the first place the realm of the spirit, which is beyond representation but has the ability to abstractly speak the unspeakable by naming. Kiefer in his artistic work tries to bridge the gap between representation and language. Word is the origin of abstraction. For Kiefer words translated into images acquire epistemological dimension, they produce knowledge, meaning, remembrance that speaks the unspeakable of melancholy by naming. "The translation of the language of things into that of humans is not only the translation of the mute into audible, it is

¹ Buck Theo, *Muttersprache-Mördersprache*, Celan Studien

² The photos were actually taken near Salzburg as Kiefer mentioned in an interview with Götz Adriani, Anselm Kiefer für Paul Celan, Catalogue for the Exhibition at Gallery Thaddeus Ropac, Salzburg, 2005

the translation of the nameless into the named. This is thus the translation of an imperfect language into a perfected one, it contributes to nothing else but knowledge. The objectivity of this translation is however hidden in God. While God created things, the creative word in Him is the seed of the cognitive name, like God finally named each thing after He created them."¹

Pic. 34. Das Lied von der Zeder - für Paul Celan (The Song of Cedar – for Paul Celan), 2005, acrylic, charcoal, branches on photograph on cardboard, 40 pages, 64 x 44 x 4 cm

Piet Mondrian, Cauterization

"The catalogue for Kiefer's exhibition in the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of 1980 is subdivided under four processes - burning, lignification, sinking and silting up (lit. sanding). To observe such processes and to apply them artistically (the mimetic participation in nature by means of process art) ... permits comparisons with automatistic surrealist techniques (Max Ernst's frottages for his 'Histoire naturelle', Wolfgang Paalen's fumages, sand paintings by André Masson) ... the black wash, made of iron oxide and linseed oil."² The way Kiefer treats his landscapes in art books and in paintings, reminds Cezanne's method of reworking his landscape with the motive of "La Montagne Sainte Victoire" by gradually breaking the integrity of representation into abstract colour pigments. One can trace stages of modernistic transformation in Kiefer's oeuvre that remind of Cezanne's initial visual experiments that further developed with Kiefer into utterly non-figurative works, as for example, his cauterised canvases. The book „Cauterization of the Rural District of Buchen“ represents a landscape that has been reduced to abstract blackness as a result of fire. But even before being cauterised, the photographed landscape was transformed into an abstraction, into schematic black-and-white squares that break the natural integrity of the representation, dividing the pictorial plane into rectangular forms that replace the actual figurative photographic image of the landscape. „To create this book Kiefer carbonised a number of paintings, then cut them up to form a series of coal black pages that he bound into eight volumes. This act of aggression on his earlier art produced a clean slate on which an artist could state a revised vision of painting.“³ The black, cauterised double pages of the books

¹ „Die Übersetzung der Sprache der Dinge in die des Menschen ist nicht nur Übersetzung des Stummen in das Luthafte, sie ist die Übersetzung des Namenlosen in den Namen. Das ist also die Übersetzung einer unvollkommenen Sprache in eine vollkommenere, sie kann nicht anders als etwas dazu tun, nämlich die Erkenntnis. Die Objektivität dieser Übersetzung ist aber in Gott verbürgt. Denn Gott hat die Dinge geschaffen, das schaffende Wort in ihnen ist der Keim des erkennenden Namens, wie Gott auch am Ende jedes Ding benannte, nachdem es geschaffen war,“ Walter Benjamin, *Medienästhetische Schriften*, pp. 76-77

² Anselm Kiefer, Catalogue for the exhibition at the State Art Gallery, Dusseldorf, Jürgen Harten, Renata Sharp, p. 53

³ Mark Rosenthal, Anselm Kiefer, p. 60

entitled „Cauterization of the Rural District of Buchen” are made from the reworked old canvases and reiterate the motive of Malevich's „Black Square.“

„Cauterization of the Rural District of Buchen VII,“ is composed of pages that are simultaneously former paintings. They manifest a flat rough texture, laying bare the surface of the medial support. Some pages are a rough abstract fabric smeared with colour pigment. From page to page Kiefer reveals the process of gradually covering the surfaces with colour till they become completely black. The book page without any script coincides here with the black canvas without image. The artist thus lays bare various media, superimposing one onto the other: a black canvas, a black-and-white photograph, black, cauterised book page. Like in Cezanne's works the same motive of mountain Sainte Victoire reappears in various modes of execution, the same motive of a tree against the background of a German landscape appears in Kiefer's art books photographed or painted. The tree motive executed in oil on canvas with a schematic palette encompassing the landscape in "Heaven-Earth" made in 1974 reappears in "Painting of the Scorched Earth" made in 1974, oil on burlap. Both paintings are based on the photograph that is included into the book "Cauterisation of the District of Buchen." Kiefer thus thematises various media, manifests the various stages of his work process, thus creating the effect of an insight into the medium's inner self, laying bare the various stages in the process of creating an art work in an effort to reveal the differences between the various modes of representation. If on the pages of the book the landscape with the tree is a photograph of a certain location in Buchen which on the consequent pages will be replaced by blackness, on the respective paintings the main emphasis is made not on the landscape but on the palette that is the focal point of the composition. In the book photographs of the similar landscape motives reiterate from page to page with various location names handwritten in the upper part. The photo images are purposefully arranged in a series introducing a narrative component, which is absent from the paintings of the same motive. The sequence of photos imitates not only the creative process laying bare the various stages of making of the book, it also imitates a certain historical process - the turning of the rural district into ashes with the progress of time and its ultimate disappearance. The medium of photography combined with the medium of the book creates a history of its own that supposedly records the fate of the region - its cauterisation. It presents the spectator with a generalised image of the rural district that is simultaneously a particular location on the map as well as German land per se. The land is photographed so that it is impossible for the viewer to associate it with any particular

destination: except for inscriptions of place names any local features, buildings or particular natural characteristics are avoided or made invisible by means of fade-ins. The medium of black-and-white photography creates the context of continuous, monotonous repetition.

The photographs have a monochromatic colour combination of black and light grey that corresponds to the simplified schematic composition: the land contrasts the sky, marking a clear horizon line in the distance. In the paintings with the same motive the landscapes with the palette are rendered in colour. The black and white monotony is replaced by colour applied in rough, oil brushwork. In the photographs the camera eye that is invisible, yet implicitly present and impying the author's subjectivity, is replaced in the paintings by the schematic representation of the palette, the symbol of painter's metier, that connects via the painted axes the heaven and the earth. The transparent palette occupies almost the whole surface of the painting. It allows the viewer to see through the medium of the artist's craft. The painter's palette creates the illusion of revelation that painting in a way different from photography might offer the spectator. The painted palette fills up the emptiness that is so conspicuous in the photographed landscapes. The painting executed in expressionistic manner unlike the photographs emphasises gradations of colour, rough texture of the medial surface, the compositional set up that oscillates between flatness and perspectival depth. In his cauterised books Kiefer subjects his medium to extreme reduction, the blank cauterised pages symbolise an empty terrain. The black double pages of the art book offer the view into the subconscious, the sub-medial, on which anything can be projected. The spectator sees a cauterised black book in a state reduced to *prima materia*. The book also invokes fascist "burnt land" policy that implemented cauterisations of the enemy territories in the course of the World War II. The cauterised book pages are a rough barbaric black background, a photographed landscape that in the progression of the book is reduced to the state of nothingness, perhaps the only state that survives the barbarism of history. "When a town surrounds itself with a circle of fire (finally falls into ashes), like into a grave (tomb) in literal sense), then it is not there any more. There remains ash, say, ash is nothing, it is not something that really is. It remains from whatever exists no more."¹ (*Pic. 35. a. Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen /Cauterisation of the Rural District of Buchen/, book, pp. 156-157, 4-5;*

¹ Wenn eine Stätte sich selbst mit einem Feuerkreis umgibt (letztlich zu Asche zerfällt (tombe), als Grab (tombe) im buchstäblichen Sinne), dann ist sie nicht mehr da. Es bleibt Asche, sprich, die Asche ist nicht, sie ist nicht das, was ist. Sie bleibt zurück von dem, was nicht ist," Jacques Derrida, *Feuer und Asche*, Paris, Berlin, 1988, p. 23, quoted after Cordula Meier, Anselm Kiefer, *Die Rückkehr des Mythos in der Kunst*, p. 122

1974, bounded original photographs, iron oxide and flax oil on wood-chip paper, 62 x 45 x 3 cm, 210 pages. Pic. 35. b. Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen, 1974, pages 4-5)

The avant-garde tradition is reflected in the works of Kiefer in the composition, reduction of colours, in the emphasis on geometric forms, in the accent on the medium. "Piet Mondrian - Operation 'Sea Lion'", 1975, is another Kiefer's book comprising 70 pages of black-and-white original photographs on cardboard. The rectangles of the window-panes with wooden frames photographed by Kiefer for the book divide the picture plane into orderly white squares. They break up the unity of the pictorial image. The geometric order breaks the conventional order of things in the artist's studio - this ruthless order is the only one that survives the chaos of barbarism in history. The rectangular frames of the geometric abstraction that gained particularly radical character in the art of Piet Mondrian are thus superimposed on the figurative images photographed in the studio and outside it, subjecting to its strict grid the nature beyond the window. The superimposed frames break the integrity of the picture plane, dividing the objects into rectangular pieces. The square format of the book itself serves as an additional means to disintegrate the photographed image into rectangles: thus the photographed bathtub with the toy ship on a double page is divided in two by the paper crease in the middle. Photographed from behind the glass the rectangular window-panes serve as the superimposed rigid frames cutting up the view outside into lifeless monotonous rectangles. The shadows and the cross format of some of the photos, as well as the representations of ordinary objects, such as the rounded bath-tub with the ship and the melting ice only intensify the defeat of the conventional image representation opposed to the abstract geometrical lines that subject everything to the austere order of their own. The title of the book refers to the Dutch avant-garde painter Piet Mondrian and to the naval operation with the code name "Sea Lion" that envisaged to invade England by the Nazi Germany in 1940. The bathtub also invokes the German artist Joseph Beuys.

The art book "Operation Sea Lion", 1975, also bears the influence of avant-garde tradition. The initial pages of the book with photos of landscapes and rivers are gradually replaced by non-figurative abstract double pages with vast water expanses that appear as rectangles rigidly restricted by the book format. Further on in the book the black-and-white photos of naval battles are reworked so that with every page figurative image becomes more and more abstract. The artist emphasises here the medium: the photograph/page surface, its rough texture (some pages are made of ferric oxide and flax oil on wood-chip paper

(Rauchfasertapete). In the end all representation is engulfed by darkness. Here the structure of the medial surface is complicated, it is made of a photograph imposed on a cardboard, or iron oxide on wood-chip paper that make up the double pages of the book. The surface of a supposed photograph coincides with the medial surface of a book page. It is dark, flat, rough and impenetrable, one might suppose that the photo image is hidden beneath the layers of black colour pigment and oil applied to the surface, yet on the other hand the book in this final abstract part creates the effect of sincerity of the medium, revealing its inner dark core, traditionally hidden beneath.

The monotonously recurring continuity of the black square, or of broken disintegrated forms is characteristic for classic avant-garde with its clearly defined projects of reduction such as: cubism, suprematism, Bauhaus. In his books where one finds the reiterating motives of burnt black squares of double pages, Kiefer attempts to accentuate the medium itself however reduced, ruined, disintegrated and minimal it might appear. He thematises German history of barbarity and war within the scope of art history accentuating and comparing various artistic media. The artist alludes to the black episodes of history via the visual effect of black emptiness created by ferric oxide on rough surface texture juxtaposing it with the blackness of the faded photographs where the image captured by the camera is reworked so that at times it can hardly be differentiated from the painted blackness as in the "Flooding of Heidelberg." It is the artist's attempt to create the effect of the sincerity of the medium, making it possible for art in this minimalist form to survive the barbarism of history. The title of the work: "Operation Sea-Lion" served as the code name for one of the Nazi military marine operations during the Second World War. (Pic. 36. Piet Mondrian, "Operation Sea-Lion," 1975, original photographs on cardboard, 57 x 42 x 12 cm, 70 pages)

Flooding

The photographs that record the destruction of a historically charged location - the German city of Heidelberg, is thematised in Kiefer's 1969 book "Die Überschwemmung Heidelbergs,"/The Flood of Heidelberg/. The black-and-white photos that make up the book show the city gradually overshadowed by darkness. Photographed models of certain buildings placed in the interior of the artist's studio against the background of waste are counterpointed with photos of original buildings in the streets of Heidelberg shown from above. The snapshots of the studio interchange with views of the city architecture decorated with fascist

signs and with snapshots of nature. Together with Kiefer's original photos one sees old photographs dating back to the beginning of the 20th century with people in the streets and squares. The flooding of Heidelberg is inaugurated by a printed text, rhetorically discussing the necessity of the city's actual destruction against a staged spectacle of its flooding. Further on in the book the artist records the phases of the flooding that actually never took place and only appears to have occurred in the photos. The city views gradually disappear finally overshadowed with complete darkness. There are no painted images in the book, except for the final pages treated with oil and cobalt sikkative. The flooding process recorded photographically is made look real. The mode of rendering history in the currently obsolete medium of analogue photography, makes the flooding seem convincing. Yet the order of the photographs in the book interrupted by occasional snapshots of the artist's studio might raise the suspicion about the reality of the represented events. The interior and the exterior, the real and the surreal are blurred. The spectator who might believe that the camera eye, notably named the "objective," always records objective reality, might be confused concerning the authenticity of the photographic sources. The artist never clarifies whether the flooding actually took place at a certain moment in the past or if it is just a figment of imagination rendered in meticulously staged and manipulated images. The photographs thus present a reality of their own, questioning the initial rhetoric about the actual flooding of the city or the staging the flood as a spectacle rendered in photography. Nature captured by the camera appears in the book as the only unchangeable aspect, impartially witnessing the events.

Sedimentation

In the books dedicated to "March Sand" a landscape of fields and snapshots of interiors are gradually effaced by layers of sand attached to photo paper mounted on wood-chip paper. In "March Sand I" the photo of the studio interior with chairs is superimposed upon the photos of the soil. The natural harmony is thus intruded upon by the square format of the interior photo divided into smaller squares of the chairs in the studio. The integrity of the landscape, as well as the integrity of the picture plane is thus broken, divided into similar rectangular motives till these in their turn disappear beneath the rough black square superimposed upon the geometric motives of the landscape blended upon the interior. The actual sedimentation however is implemented in the book "March Sand IV." The motive of the rectangular window-panes that introduces the rational geometric grid violently cuts up the integrity of

nature: as the soil and frail tree-trunks. The fragmentation of the landscape into rectangular segments further continues by means of the rigid restriction of the imagery within the square book format, with double pages dividing the image into two identical squares with paper crease in the middle. Kiefer emphasises here the medial surface by imposing various layers onto it: photos are imposed onto the cardboard over the wood-chip paper and further overcast with sand. Thus the process of landscape's disappearance, started by the introduction onto its surface of a geometric grid structure concludes with the landscape's complete reduction to an abstract sand square. Kiefer emphasises here the impossibility to read the message of the book through the layer of sand, as well as the impossibility to see through the sand the implied original image beneath it. The spectator is thus confused, unable to differentiate the original surface of the medium from the superimposed layers of sand. The sand square appears as the rough medial surface. On the other hand the sand square contains the photo image hidden beneath the surface. This complicated interplay of various medial surfaces superimposed and blended over each other manifests the complexity of the texture as well as the artist's work process. Kiefer manifests the basic insincerity of artistic representational media as well as any other media in general, even in such an extremely reduced abstract state. What appears on the medial surface of a book page, or a photo does not reveal the medium's inner nature. This fact once more underlies the fundamental discrepancy between the medium and the message. The same with Kiefer's landscapes - they never are what they appear to be - not the innocent, peaceful terrains of wheat, but show-places of battles, where the barbaric theatre of history took place. The "March Sand" implies the landscape of the Eastern part of Germany - traditionally perceived as the landscape of "horror vacui", defeat, angst of the unknown and the desert. The sedimentation therefore brings the motive of martyrdom of the nature, as well as the martyrdom of the conventional image on the picture plane fragmented by the geometric grid imposed over the image. The martyrdom is intensified by the suggested silence of the nature and of the book. As the blank pages contain no text, they are unreadable for the spectator and thus forever silenced. (*Pic.37. March Sand IV, 1976, flax oil and sand, on bound original photographs and wood-chip paper, cardboard bound with original photographs, 60 x 42,5 x 5 cm, 48 pages*)

Martyrdom

The reduction to the bare medium characteristic for avant-garde in the visual arts was

reiterated in all other arts including poetry. In the works of Paul Celan poetry is reduced to its main medium the language, which is in turn fragmented to the level of its components: broken syntax, words, sounds. Thus the message of the linguistic medium in its extreme reduction becomes the message of the poet himself, who replaces his own language with that of the medium. For Paul Celan this was the only method to speak the unspeakable of the Shoah in his poetry, as for example in "Death Fugue". The fragmentation of natural speech into separate reiterating semantic motives, words and sounds introduces into Celan's poetry the martyrdom of the language itself broken into particles, reduced to mere sounds (Klang) as in "nur mit Wind, mit Zeit und mit Klang". This "martyrdom" of the German language is the only "barbarity" a poet can afford evoking the martyrdom of the Shoah victims as a result of the Nazi barbarities. This "violence" against poetic language is the only means to enable it survive the barbarism of history, once more emphasising Theodor Adorno's point that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric."

In his two books dedicated to "Sulamith" Kiefer combines the tradition of avant-garde in visual arts with the tradition of avant-garde in poetry. Sulamith was the legendary bride in the "Song of Songs" of the Old Testament. Sulamith is also the symbol of the Holocaust victims in Paul Celan's "Death Fugue" written in 1945. In Kiefer's "Sulamith" she is rendered as the violated body of a lead book. The motive of a book plays an important role with Kiefer, it is related to the book of books: the Bible - the book of knowledge, Kiefer's book "Sulamith" however is the book of suffering. The spectator gets the impression that text has been erased from its pages. "Sulamith" is elevated here to an absolute state both by Kiefer in his art book and by Paul Celan in the poem, to an artistic absolute, where the form itself expresses the content of martyrdom in its reduced, pure state. This absolute purity or absolute abstractness calls attention to the physical aspect, to the substance, to the medium which is irreducible - in Celan's poem it is the language, the word, the sound, in Kiefer's work it is the medial support: empty book pages of lead. "Sulamith" both in Kiefer's book and in Celan's poem is the example of "pure poetry" as an expression of an absolute in which all relativities and contradictions are either resolved or behind the point, and where subject matter becomes something given in the form itself. Kiefer's "Sulamith" reintroduces the "absolute that the avant-garde arrived at - 'abstract' or 'non-objective' art - and poetry too. The avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid. Content is dissolved so completely into form that the work of art

and literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything else not itself."¹

The books are monumental. The empty pages with patches of black hair pressed between the them are bound together in volumes. After his initial art books where he thematised German identity, cultural stereotypes and the possibility of painting in the post-Nazi epoch, Kiefer once more analyses the modes of creating art after the Holocaust and the possibility of writing poetry after Paul Celan. By re-interpreting the conventional methods of book writing, Kiefer reduces his "Sulamith" books to minimalistic objects, in a certain way like Sulamith is reduced to the patches of black hair on blank pages. Presenting pages without text, Kiefer thus reveals the empty medial surface, containing nothing but the remnants of Sulamith's beauty in decay. (*Pic. 38. Sulamith 1990, soldered lead, woman hair, ash, 101 x 63 x 11 cm, 64 pages*)

Kiefer's books and paintings dedicated to Sulamith focus on the disgusting, the deformation, distortion and ruin of initial beauty through burning, presentation of bodily rests or residues of nature: nails, hair, ash, burnt soil. The use of anti-aesthetic materials emphasises the fact that the term 'beauty' is turned here into a parody of itself. For Kiefer the term of beauty in art is inappropriate, replaced by the importance of the component of truth communicated by an artwork, that can be better articulated by means of distorted, fragmented, broken forms that mark disappearance or decay. In fact what remains of women in Kiefer's works, are either remnants of their bodies: nails, hair patches, ash covered garments or personal names inscribed in hand on medial surface, painted portraits or photographs are rare.

The criteria of classic beauty might remain unchanged yet for Kiefer they are not appropriate to articulate the truth about suffering or death. Conventional beauty standards were historically abused to instigate racist discrimination resulting in violence. Hair, particularly its colour has always been a major attribute of feminine beauty. According to Sabine Schutz hair in Kiefer's work is a metaphor for racist discrimination. Hair colour played a fatal role in the history of racism, next to the skin and eye colour, together with skull form and body structure it was the main focus of the so-called race research that was established throughout Europe especially with the German authors of nationalistic inclinations.² Black hair used to be

¹ Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol. 2, p. 8

² "Eine fatale Rolle spielte Haar und Haarfarbe in der Geschichte des Rassismus;...war das menschliche Haar, neben der Haut- und Augenfarbe sowie dem Schädel- und dem Körperbau, eines der Hauptkriterien der so genannten Rassenforschung, die sich im 19. Jahrhundert in Europa etablieren konnte und sich vor allem in den Schriften deutscher Autoren mit nationalistischen Gedankengut verwandt," Sabine Schütz, Anselm Kiefer, *Geschichte als Material, Arbeiten 1969-1983*, p. 297

associated with evil, the witches, whereas the straw blond hair was the sign of ideal Arian feminine beauty, like the straw hair of Margarethe in Kiefer's paintings. Hair colour as the sign of racial identification was used in the Nazi propaganda to discriminate Jewish or non-Arian women. Glued onto the medial support in Kiefer's paintings or books hair patches evoke feelings of disgust. The motive of hair in these works is not the commemoration of feminine beauty but recollection of the hair-cutting procedure in concentration camps.

Lilith

The same way as in Jewish mythology in the works of Kiefer Lilith introduces the theme of endless exile and absence. The demonic Lilith and her daughters replace the Biblical *Shekhinah* which in Jewish mythology stands for the heavenly feminine aspect that symbolises wisdom and divine presence, which in Christian mythology relates to Sophia. The motives of Lilith and of Sulamith from Jewish mythology are closely related in Kiefer's oeuvre, as they both express absence, exile, melancholy. In the book "Lilith", 1990, Kiefer represents page after page various aspects of Lilith as the symbol of Saturnine melancholy invested with demonic power. The artist emphasises the continuous presence of this image starting from esoteric Kabbala legends up to its appearance in Kiefer's books against the backdrop of contemporary cityscapes. Lilith in ancient Israel was a vicious female demon, her name originates from the Babylonian "Lilitu" - the tempest demon, in folk mythology she was regarded as the night phantom (Jes. 34,14) due to the similarity to the "lajil" (Hebr. night), according to the Rabbinic tradition she was the first wife of Adam, she left him and turned into a demon.¹ According to the Bible Lilith found her peace with the wild beasts in the fortresses of Edom, destroyed by God. In Talmud she is characterised as a pervert demon who seduces men and threatens pregnant women. In the 6th- 9th centuries she is identified as "the first Eve," made of the same earth as Adam. She pronounced the forbidden unspeakable name of God and chose exile to the Red Sea. The Zohar characterises her as the perverse, prostitute, betraying and related to the black, the queen of the evil and the wife of Samael. Kabbala gives her the function parallel to *Shekhinah*: the divine presence. Lilith is the mother of the profane peoples, she rules over the impure realm. In the teachings of astrology Lilith is related to the planet Saturn. She is represented as a snake, an attribute of Saturn, and is symbolised by lead,

¹ Meyers Großes Universallexikon, Band 8, p. 156

an impure metal. She is the mother of those who have a melancholic temperament, e.g. artists - "the sons of Lilith."¹

The pages of Kiefer's book "Lilith" appear impure, the black-and-white photographs of contemporary cities, of deserted pavements, buildings or airplanes indicate the places haunted by Lilith. The photographs of these topographies are ash-covered, smeared, opaque. Kiefer creates the illusion of revealing whatever is represented beneath the surface layer of smear and ash on the pages at the same time making the task impossible. These are uninviting, sombre locations that are represented universal and timeless. The aspect of Lilith's presence, her demonic trace of ash over the medial surface impairs vision. Ash, covering the surface of the pages implies devastation by fire, ash symbolises the rests of something that once existed and is gone, it also refers to the ash of the Nazi crematoria.

In the book "Lilith" and "Liliths Töchter" (Lilith's Daughters) it is hardly possible to see whatever is captured by the camera through the layer of ash, pigment and impurities applied to the pages. Lines, shapes, contours are faded in, non-transparent, unintelligible, both the heavens and the earth are represented in the book as the grey, monotonous, uninhabitable and unreadable. The book "Lilith"

is not the book of knowledge but on the contrary it spells out the impossibility of any knowledge either about Lilith or about the worlds to which she belongs. Kiefer renders it impossible to understand the nature of Lilith - the victim, the violent demon, the feminine aspect arousing desire and melancholy. Lilith's name inscribed against the ash-covered surface of the book page where the heaven and the earth merge is related both to the profane and to the celestial. Lilith is contradictory, inconceivable as the world itself represented by Kiefer.

Schechina was interpreted by Cabbalists as mother of wisdom that had to bear the fruit of knowledge. In the book "Liliths Töchter" (Lilith's Daughters) 1990, Kiefer refers to Lilith and her daughters as the opposite of Schechina. Lilith's daughters - these mysterious female images that stem from ancient Jewish mythology are represented existing beyond historical time, they appear everpresent. By attaching smeared garments representing Lilith's daughters over enlarged photos of contemporary cities the effect of timelessness, of suffering and exile in the world acquires universal character that continues through all times and places. Like Shulamith, Lilith's daughters are in the first place related to the theme of the Shoah, and

¹Daniel Arasse, Anselm Kiefer, pp. 277-228

secondly to the theme of universal suffering that can be ascribed to mankind on the whole in spite of the surface signs of contemporary civilisation and technological progress. The daughters of Lilith are expected to be withces. They are restless demons, the forces of the underworld that are constantly wandering on earth. Lilith and her daughters are supposed to be hunted and killed. In Jewish mythology they carry the stigma of rebellers, irrational dark forces, killers of babies, melancholic seducers. For Kiefer they are the symbols "the other", the different, the ousted but nonetheless everpresent in the darkness of the subconscious, an archetype. "Lilith's daughters" are the symbols of the irrational and the melancholic in art. Their presence is marked with inscriptions, patches of black hair or dresses connected to each other with cords. The theme of bodily fragmentation and torture is rendered in the book "Lilith's Daughters" by means of heavily worked surface of the book pages. The medial surface is rough, uneven, the photographed images are hardly seen beneath the layers of geometric shapes imposed onto them. Their severe geometric austerity, their sharp, angular contours contradict the shapes of the ash-covered garments that repeat flowing, feminine forms. The fragmented flat pieces of lead applied to the pages indicate the motive of human torture through fragmentation and dismemering. The trace of human body – the garments and the handwritten inscription "Liliths Töchter" in the upper part of the book's title page, looks estranged and threatened by the angular forms of the metropolis buildings below. "Lilith's Daughters" are destined for exile, there is no place for them in the space arranged according to a hostile order, where the organic body is threatened with death. A dress without the body wearing it, like the page of a book without a written text, indicates absence, the inability of communication, the ultimate emptiness that art fails to fill up, the aspect of missing knowledge. (*Pic. 39. Liliths Töchter (Lilith's Daughters), 1990, 102 x 76 x 18 cm, 62 pages, acrylic, emulsion and ash on original photos on cardboard with lead strips and ash dresses, private collection*)

Body visually dismembered into abstract geometric parts appeared earlier in Kiefer's book "Donald Judd Hides Brunhilde" made in 1976. Superimposing the reproductions of minimalistic sculptures of Donald Judd, on the photographic images of a woman's body Kiefer accentuates the hostility of the austere geometric shapes to the rounded organic forms of a female body. Thus human body is visually divided on the pages of the book into separate parts by means of imposing rectangular forms over it. In this earlier work Kiefer does not renounce representation altogether, one can see the woman's body through the black abstract

grid.

Isis and Osiris

The theme of fragmentation is present in the ancient Egyptian myth about Osiris, who was killed by his brother Seth. Disappearance, fracture, reduction to pieces and their expression by formal means in art are the issues that interest the artist in analysing this myth. The legend has it that Egyptian god Geb symbolising the earth, in Greek mythology equivalent to Khronos, and the Egyptian goddess Rhea (Nut) united secretly. Thot (Hermes) won some time as he played with the moon the board game and managed to add five days to the year. In these five days Osiris (Apollo in Greek mythology) Typhon (Seth), Isis and Nephtys were born. Osiris the king led mankind from barbarity to civilisation with his eloquence and songs. His brother Typhon (Seth) the symbol of chaos, war and ruse was envious of Osiris. He decided to kill Osiris by trickery in order to take over his throne. At a feast he provided an artfully decorated chest. The one who could fit into the chest would become its owner. None of the guests except Osiris could fit into the chest. As soon as Osiris was lying in the chest Typhon covered it with the lid and threw the sealed chest into the river Nilos. Isis, Osiris's wife, set out in search for the chest to recover Osiris's corpse. The chest was carried by the river to Byblos, where it was stuck in a tree trunk, which the king of Byblos cut down and used as a support column in his palace. Upon her arrival in Byblos Isis demanded the column. She cut the chest out of it, brought it back to Egypt and using her magic managed to conceive the son Horus.

In the meantime Typhon found the chest again while hunting. He tore Osiris's corpse into pieces and scattered them all over Egypt. Isis again set out in search for the parts of Osiris' body. Each time she found Osiris's body part she held a burial ceremony, this accounts for the existence of numerous graves of Osiris in different ritual places. Isis found all body parts except for the phallus since Typhon fed it up to fishes in the water. Later Osiris's son, Horus, fought revenge against Seth, and finally defeated him.

In Kiefer's art book "Isis and Osiris," 1987, the theme of Osiris's bodily fragmentation and torture is rendered through the repetitive motive of fragmented ceramic splinters scattered over the book pages, covered with a thick layer of clay and mud, that symbolise the soil of

Egypt fertilised by the river Nil. It is noteworthy that the myth rendering the fate of Osiris has been repeatedly represented by Kiefer in his art books. Here again like in the books for Sulamith or Lilith there is no written text. Yet writing is implied by books. According to the interpretation of the Osiris myth by philosopher Jacques Derrida, Seth, the brother of Osiris, who killed him by trickery, was the deity of funerary rituals and of writing. Anselm Kiefer does not directly refer to Jacques Derrida in his works, however Derrida's interpretation of the Egyptian myth of Osiris is important in analysing Kiefer's works dedicated to the myth. These works encompass writing as a formal element: letters and numbers are written on the canvas, the myth is rendered in the form of art-books that suppose writing. Since Derrida's text in his book "Of Grammatology" analyses the nature of writing and consequently the nature of representation, it is noteworthy to mention some of its excerpts that relate to the motives of writing, book-making and representation in Kiefer's works.

According to Derrida writing as a violent, vicious aspect personified in the myth by Seth who dismembered and killed speech symbolised by Osiris. Seth killed Osiris by means of ruse and trickery. Therefore writing as the imitation of speech is claimed by Derrida as false, evil, supplementary - a dead imitation, doubling presence - the actual speech. As Derrida further discusses on the example of the Osiris myth, it is not only the violent nature of writing that is in question here, but the nature of mimesis, representation in art itself, the issue that is also analysed by Kiefer in his works. According to Rousseau, as he is quoted by Derrida '...the essence of art is *mimesis*. Imitation re-doubles presence, adds itself to it by supplementing it. Thus it makes the present pass into its outside. In the inanimate arts, the outside is split and it is the reproduction of the outside in the outside. The presence of the thing itself is already exposed in exteriority...' ¹ The supplementary character of mimesis is considered to add nothing, and is claimed to be useless. Therefore mimesis is claimed to be dangerous to the integrity of what is represented and to the original purity of the nature of representation. '... Already within imitation, the gap between the thing and its double, that is to say between the sense and its image, assures a lodging for falsehood, falsification, and vice ... The taste for and power of imitation are inscribed within nature ... vice and duplicity are ... diseases of imitation, a monstrous abnormality. Evil is a result of a sort of perversion of imitation, of imitation within imitation.' ²

¹ Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, p. 205

² Ibid.

On the pages of Kiefer's art book there are no mimetic images of Osiris or Isis, they are replaced by non-figurative abstractions. Kiefer emphasises in his book the empty monochrome medial surface of the pages, the uneven texture of clay and dried mud applied over original photographs on cardboard. (*Pic. 40. Isis and Osiris, 1987, clay and mud on original photographs over cardboard with copper cords and ceramic splinters, 72 x 55 x 8 cm, 36 pages, private collection*)

Iconoclasm

Representation versus non-representation was analysed by Kiefer in his cycle of works entitled "Bilderstreit" (Iconoclastic Controversy). "Bilderstreit" is actually the eighth-ninth century Christian doctrinal debate over the status of representation in religious art. Arguing against the representation of religious personages in visual art, the Byzantine iconoclasts took the Biblical prohibition against "graven images," believing that visual representations of the divine could confuse and mislead the faithful. The image worshippers on the other hand believed that the religious image participates in the divine and could lead human minds toward it. "The Emperor Leo III unleashes iconoclasm in Byzantium in 726; his son Constantine V prohibits the making and dissemination of icons in 754; in 787 at the 7th Nicene Council called by the Irene, image-worship is justified again, and in 843 finally permitted again. In 791 Charlemagne issues a critical analysis of both parties standpoints in the 'libri Caroligni'. This is adopted by the Roman-Catholic church)."¹ Centuries later, Kiefer set the "iconoclastic controversy" into the context of contemporary epoch, which is notorious for its state-of-the-art image producing technologies. Analysing the subject on the forty-two pages of his art book made up of black-and-white photos Kiefer emphasises the ambiguity that characterises representational media. Painting and particularly photography, although claimed to reproduce the true facts and events, can be often used to provide highly biased and manipulated images. Both, painting and in the 20th century photography, were and are still extensively used to influence masses for ideological, political and commercial purposes. Kiefer emphasises the ability of representational media to distort reality and to falsify facts in order to manipulate the spectator. Most of the photos in his art book "Iconoclastic Controversy" are staged scenes of battles. Kiefer, for example, manipulates and stages his own body as a fascist in his "Occupations" series. In his book "Iconoclastic Controversy" and in the respective paintings on the same topic Kiefer by means of the medium of photography

¹ Anselm Kiefer, Catalogue for the exhibition at the State Art Gallery, Dusseldorf, Jürgen Harten, Renata Sharp, p. 88

analyses both painting and photography as a very ambiguous medium, that has always historically been manipulated and still remains so. It is not incidental that in his painting "Iconoclastic Controversy" made in 1980, the palette coincides with the surface of the painting made up of the wood-grain pattern that is in Kiefer's art identified with the fascist aspect of the "blood and soil" policy of the Nazi regime. It also refers to the persecution of the modernist style in art by the Nazis as a result of which modern art was consequently termed as "degenerate art" (entartete Kunst). Based on racial and ideological intolerance, this policy promoted painting and sculpture that was narrowly traditional in manner and that exalted the values of racial purity, militarism and obedience. Representation, in painting can thus be viewed as the tool for aggression, injustice, manipulation and influence, political or commercial. After such tainted history "controversy" over iconoclasm might seem as relevant now as in the eighth century in religious circles. Therefore the palette - the symbol of painting - is reduced in Kiefer's works to fragments, distorted splinters revealing not particularly the divine aspect as claimed by the iconodules but the fractured form, that renounces image, the faded colour, the empty frames offering the view of the surface, that allows the spectator to analyse the medium that supports the image, painted or the photographed, e.g. pages 32-33 of the "Iconoclastic Controversy" book.

By photographing the empty surface of the palette or the empty surface of the stage-like floor of his studio (pages 8-9, 10-11 of the same book) Kiefer makes an artistic disclosure of the medial surface that underlies representation and writing. The surface of the palette can be interpreted as the background for the supposed image that coincides with the empty page of the book or the empty canvas. "Iconoclastic Controversy" is rendered as a series of battles staged in Kiefer's studio with toy tanks surrounding the threatened palette on the sand-covered floor. The battle appears staged. On some of the pages names of historical persons actually involved into this religious controversy in the eighth-ninth centuries are inscribed. The "controversy" is photographed from various angles to give the spectator an apparently truthful visual account of the event. Yet one gets the impression that the scenery is manipulated, certain parts of the photographs are purposefully darkened to hide from the viewer the aspects that do not fit the author's narrative. The painter's palette is threatened by fire and by tanks.

Kiefer questions not only painting's religious aspect, which is only a surface pretext, but the essence of painting, the role of representation in the history of painting and in the history of

religion. As an artist, whose main medium is painting, he is aware of the power of the mimetic representation on the spectator, he is also aware of the way it was abused by the fascist propaganda. However Kiefer cannot completely renounce painting even in spite of the Old Testament prohibition of creating "the graven image." While viewing the book one realises the incompatibility between the appearance of events on the painted or photographed surface and their inner nature. This basic incompatibility is the core of the centuries-long "controversy" that seems never to be solved. It is not only the representation of this particular battle over "the iconoclastic controversy" that might appear distorted and manipulated, but representation in general. (*Pic. 41. Iconoclastic Controversy II, 1980, shellac on original photographs, on cardboard, 58 x 43 x 8 cm, 42 pages*)

Painting

"Du bist Maler" (You Are Painter) is Kiefer's art-book containing black-and-white photos. The issues of being an artist, the artist's role and the purpose of art have always been one of the basic subjects not only with Kiefer but with almost all artists. In this book Kiefer considers his role of an artist in light of German history. The image on the book cover is appropriated from the totalitarian art of Joseph Thorak, who along with Arno Breker was one of the most important National-Socialist sculptors. "You Are Painter," as the title indicates, is not only the negotiation of Kiefer's own artistic identity in the aftermath of fascism but a direct appeal, addressed to the anonymous painter of the past and of the present, whom the artist doubts and mistrusts.

Interestingly enough the painter and painting itself is absent from Kiefer's book. The artist analyses the essence of being a painter replacing the medium of painting with the medium of photography. This indicates the crisis of painting, the survival of which is seriously doubted. By questioning painting as medium in general, Kiefer casts doubt not only on his personal activity as a painter but on the artistic practice of other painters of his time. The anonymous "you" in the title is addressed to anyone: to the spectator, to the other. Painting replaced in the first place by the medium of photography on the pages of an art book is thus made irrelevant, inadequate, unable to survive after serving a fascist regime.

In the photos included into the book the camera photographically documents a painter's disorderly studio, trivial everyday objects, toy soldiers, painter's brush, fake marble floor etc.

Painting is thus reduced to a trivial, false, staged and manipulated activity, dependent on photography and on a book format to record its existence for the spectator. Consequently all other painters, implied by "you," are also implied as inadequate and irrelevant within the existing cultural climate. It is not so much the contents of the pages that matters here, but the missing aspect of painting replaced by monotonous, black-and-white photography that is used as the main medium for the book. The medium of photography allows the artist to provide snapshots of his studio as the arena of insignificant artistic battles. The same studio serves also as a window into the world outside and is the place of the bohemian disorder with scraps of paper and waste lying on the fake marble floor. The artist counterpoints the pathetic cover of the book to the prosaic contents, rendered in photos, depicting the commonplace metaphor of creative disorder in the artist's atelier, combined with the toy soldiers involved in the battles staged on the studio table. The cover photo represents a close up of a sculpture of Joseph Thorak in a pathetic pose of an artist with one hand pressed emphatically to his breast with an inspired expression on his uplifted face. Joseph Thorak, a Nazi artist, served as a role model for artists under the National-Socialist regime. His sculpture of an artist suggesting selflessness in the service of art is juxtaposed on the following pages by the relatively muted enthusiasm of the toy soldiers (Die Leibgarde), arranged for an imaginary battle on a studio table. The insignificant nature of this mockery battle on the table is emphasised not only by the small size of the soldiers photographed from above but also by setting next to it the page with a photo capturing the studio room with its shabby untidy interior - unfitting set for the battle. The photos of the toy soldiers also emphasise the shallow and militant character of art serving ideology.

Disorder in the studio is intensified by the disorder within the toy regiments that suffer evident losses. In the meantime the table on which the battle took place is in the following photos a conventional kitchen table with food rests, plates, cups and work tools. Some photos capture the table from above others focus on the large window letting in the daylight. The banal image of an artist on the cover in an exaggeratedly enthusiastic posture represents Kiefer's dilemma about the image and the role of an artist in his country's history. The focus on the disorder in the studio, on the ambience deprived of the spectacular details, the snapshots of the futility of the artistic process hints at the disorientation of the studio owner concerning his role as an artist and the goals of his art. The tainted heritage of the previous generations has reduced the role of an artist to a banal figure in stone in an exaggerated pose

equalled further in the book to toy soldiers on the table. Therefore the actual painter is absent, he is nowhere to be seen. The claustrophobic atmosphere of the studio full of various objects stresses the absence of the painter himself. There is no place for the painter here. One gets the impression that the artist himself is defeated and not his toy soldiers. The void, "horror vacui," created by the absence of the painter is filled with a profusion of objects, a living artist is replaced by an image in stone, the tainted "heroic symbol" on the book cover. "In 'Du bist Maler' Kiefer used for the 60-ies a highly unusual method of artistic approach, even within the context of the conceptual art dominating at the time. This moment influenced Kiefer's entire further work: the photographically documented records and the simultaneously simulated 'historical' events as the background of his artistic messages, which relate his earlier books to the work created in 1973/74/." ¹ (*Pic. 42. Du bist Maler (You Are Painter), 1969, ink, original photographs, illustrated photos on paper, 25 x 19 x 1cm, 220 pages*)

The Hero

After analysing painting and his identity as a painter in post-fascist Germany, Kiefer proceeded to questioning the concept of a hero and the representation of the heroic in mass media in his further book: "Heroic Symbols" (Heroische Sinnbilder). In this book the artist exposes the falseness of the myth of a hero that is largely a manipulated image, made available thanks to the photographic medium. The difference of this book from "You Are Painter" is in the fact that it contains some colour paintings along with black-and-white photographs. However the book reveals that art like the artist, Kiefer himself, who acts the assumed role of a "heroic symbol" needs a pedestal to appear heroic. "Heroic Symbols" are not as pathetic as the title might suggest, on the contrary the artist, making the fascist salute gesture with a raised hand, makes a parody. The book exposes the medium of photography as the means for creating an appearance of heroism which often does not comply with reality. The "heroic symbol" staged by Kiefer here is a manipulated, false image which has little to do with truth. Kiefer is photographed posing as a fascist within a staged ambience, with carefully chosen clothes and gestures, he is made to appear like a hero. For example the wonder of walking on water, in "Walking on Water (Attempt in the Bathtub)" is in fact no wonder at all, but a staged trick in the artist's bathtub, which is photographically presented as a wonder to

¹ "Du bist Maler" ist ein für sechziger Jahre höchst ungewöhnliches Vorgehen, selbst wenn man den Kontext der damals vorherrschenden Konzeptkunst sieht. Dies wäre als weiteres, sein (Kiefers) zukünftiges Schaffen prägendes Moment zu nennen: die photographisch festgehaltene Dokumentation und die gleichzeitige Simulation "historischer" Ereignisse als Hintergrund seiner malerischen Aussagen, welche die frühen Bücher mit dem von 1973/74 entstehenden Werk verbinden," Toni Stooss in Anselm Kiefer, Bücher, 1969-1990, p. 27

mislead and manipulate the spectator.

The use of photography for the manipulation of public opinion and misleading the viewer is not the method invented by Kiefer. The fascist regime was very efficient in using photography for propaganda reasons. Back in the 1930-s Walter Benjamin pointed out the new media of photography as the means for influencing the masses for war propaganda: "The mass reproduction of reproductions of masses is particularly noteworthy. In the big parades of monstrous crowds, in mass events of sport character and in war, that is recorded today by the reproduction media the mass sees itself in the face. This process, the consequences of which one cannot overestimate, is closely related to the development of the reproduction – respectively, recording media. In general mass movements present themselves more eagerly to the media, than to the eye of the observer. Shots of hundreds of thousands are at best represented from the bird's eye perspective ... Mass movements and above all war, represent the form of human relationship that particularly suits media."¹

In his book on Kiefer Matthew Biro pointed out that in "Heroic Symbols" he juxtaposed the mechanic and the painterly imagery to emphasise that the development of technologies of mass reproduction had a tremendous effect on the promulgation of the socially constructed modes of individual and collective identity, producing extremely violent cultural stereotypes, role models for mass consumption and stereotyped identities that Kiefer portrays² using his own body. This is a true interpretation, however what is not mentioned here, is that photography, the medium of mass reproduction is instrumental in production not merely of "a stereotyped cultural identity" but of a hero - a so-called "heroic symbol" which does not really exist but is constructed and orchestrated by means of photography. The medium of photography enables the mediocre and the trivial appear as heroic and pathetic in order to influence. It is not so much cultural stereotypes that Kiefer thematises in this book but the profound falseness of the concept of a heroic image which has nothing heroic about it in

¹ "Die Massenweise Reproduktion der Reproduktion von Massen besonderes entgegenkommt. In die großen Festaufzügen den Monsterversammlungen in den Massenveranstaltungen sportlicher Art und im Krieg, die heute sämtlich die Aufnahmeapparatur zugeführt werden sieht die Masse sich selbst ins Gesicht. Dieser Vorgang dessen Tragweite keiner Betonung bedarf, hängt aufs engsten mit der Entwicklung der Reproduktions – beziehungsweise Aufnahmetechnik zusammen. Massenbewegungen stellen sich in allgemeinen der Apparatur deutlicher dar, als dem Blick. Kaders von hunderttausenden lassen sich vor der Vogelperspektive aus am besten erfassen ... Das heißt das Massenbewegungen und an ihren Spitze der Krieg, eine der Apparatur besonderes entgegenkommende Form des Menschlichen Verhaltens darstellen," in Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner Technischen Reproduzierbarkeit, Walter Benjamin, Gesammelte Schriften, Rolf Tiedemann Hrsg., Vol. 1, p. 467

² Matthew Biro, Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger, p. 31

reality, but is made to appear so only thanks to the medium of photography. The media critical impact of the "Heroic Symbols" is still relevant, since technologies of reproduction are still instrumental in creating the appearance of the heroic and the extraordinary of something conventional and mediocre for increasing sales or influencing public opinion.

Media of mass reproduction played an important role in the establishment of the fascist regime in Germany. It is the medium of photography that makes Kiefer's "heroic symbols" either seem glorious or reduced and lost in the perspective. All depends on the angle from which the snapshot is made, the close up or the view from a distance, the lighting and the arrangement of the interior. The camera eye makes "the wonder of walking on water" possible, whereas "the hero" and "the wonder" in fact are staged. The emphasis on photography is very important here since unlike painting, photography is claimed to truly represent reality, which turns out to be false for anyone, who turns the pages of Kiefer's art book. In comparison with the painted "heroic symbol" that appears side by side with the photographed one, the watercolour image is even less convincing.

The same can be said of the photos of the "King's Palaces in Bavaria" that are also included in the book. Palace "Neuschwanstein" as well as most of the palaces constructed by King Ludwig II are famous for being extremely kitschy and tasteless. Yet they are photographed so that the spectator is impressed by their supposed grandeur and heroic ambience. In his film "Ludwig II" Luchino Visconti manifested the decadent, tasteless and preposterous ambience of these palaces, that emphasise not the heroic but the failed aspect, yet it is the medium of photography that allows to create the appearance of majestic heroism about these palaces. Therefore the watercolour representing red roses against a painted poisonous green background by the end of the book thematises the whole topic of the "heroic symbol" as a tasteless cliché, that degrades art.

Kiefer's studio reappears on certain pages of this book. This time the painter is present on most of the pages, he poses as a fascist in front of the camera in person. Kiefer imitates provocative identity models from his country's immediate past. On the initial pages one sees the dark figure photographed against the backdrop of a window. Kiefer, the "heroic symbol" attempts to perform the miracle of walking on water. As is clear from the photos the heroism is reduced here to standing on a pedestal hidden in the bathtub full of water.

On the photos depicting Kiefer, posing as the fascist "heroic symbol," against the backdrop of the Rhine river or against the deserted German landscapes he stands with the right hand raised in Hitler salute. The small size of the depicted "hero" stresses his insignificance and pettiness within the ambience that engulfs him. The incompatibility of the notion of hero with the ambience of insignificance, where "the heroic symbol" is represented emphasises the sarcasm of the artist towards his hero. There's the evident contrast between the gigantic ambitious style of the National-Socialist mode of representation that glorified its heroes and the insignificantly small size of Kiefer's "hero". In the book this opposition is evident from the juxtaposed images of Joseph Thorak's massive sculpture "Head of the Young Friedrich II" or Albert Wredow's large scale "Victory Goddess with the Fallen Soldier" placed next to the photo of a tiny "heroic symbol" performed by Kiefer himself with the hand raised in Hitler salute. The figure is compositionally insignificant within the surrounding landscape.

Further in the book there are photos of a tea-drinking routine in a conventional bourgeois interior, followed by the ceremony of fascist soldiers being awarded by their chief in the field. The scene is quite trivial, stripped of the glorifying aura, the camera impartially documents the procedure from the distance, reducing the awarded "heroes" in perspective. The watercolours and photos are accurately glued to the white pages of the book giving the impression of a diary. The claustrophobic interior of the artist's studio reappears towards the end of the book, followed by the watercolour representing red roses and a photo of Robert Ullmann's plaster female nude "Abend," (Evening) - both images are typical, cliché, kitsch symbols. Anselm Kiefer's „Heroic Symbols“ depict a moment of identity at a crossroads, a moment when identity – personal, cultural and national – was so called into question that cultural products must necessarily be seen as symptomatic, if not emblematic, of this moment of crisis.¹ By incorporating photos into his art books, Anselm Kiefer draws a parallel between the medium of photography and the medium of painting. He analyses how history has been depicted by these various media. In his “Heroic Symbols” as well as in his "Occupations" composed mostly of photographs the artist emphasises, how history can be staged by the media of representation: photography or painting in order to manipulate the viewer. The camera eye that supposedly represents objective reality appears to falsify historic events, misrepresent them for the sake of serving ideological goals. Placing photography side by side with painting, or mounting painted images on photographs, Kiefer questions the role of painting in representing history.

¹ Matthew Biro, Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger, p. 52

The media of representation, photography and painting, within the art book format, articulate the juxtaposition of the media of representation to the medium of book that implies writing. Inspecting Kiefer's art books one notices, how texts are almost completely replaced by images. This tendency reflects the Nazi practices of replacing texts by more effective tools for influencing greater masses of population: images, propaganda posters, photographs, monumental architecture. Kiefer's art books with sequences of staged photographs make one realise that one sees not reality the way it is, but reality created by the medium itself. The role of representation and the role of the media of reproduction in our understanding of history and in recording the events of history are opposed to the role of the book.

Kiefer's cauterised books are often reduced to the medial support: the burnt pages, the black canvases that make up the books. Such books cannot be easily used in ideological purposes. Representation: painting or photography are for the artist subversive media, subject to ideological contamination. The figure with the hand raised in Hitler salute is an image massively reproduced by the fascist regime to influence the masses, an image that was created and disseminated by means of photography and glorified by painting. One questions, if the hero reproduced in the "heroic symbols" really existed and if the "occupations" really took place, or whether they were merely staged, created by the medium of representation producing an appearance, the way they are rendered in Kiefer's books. The artist creates an ambiguous image of the hero leaving the spectator confused and disoriented, he questions the role of representation media that reproduce the heroic images for ideological purposes. The photographs of a figure with a hand raised in Hitler salute, although staged and evidently critical of the fascist regime, the way it appears in "Heroic Symbols" and in "Occupations" has retained such power over the spectator that it up to now leaves the viewer doubtful, confused, disturbed.

Initially this figure, represented in painting or captured by the camera objective, overshadowed the authentic critical impact of Kiefer's books to the extent, that they were misinterpreted. Kiefer as a painter cannot renounce representation, he partly replaces it with abstraction, that renounces mimetic images. Most of his books end with blank pages, where not representation but the medial support, its texture and its composition are stressed. (*Pic. 43. Heroische Sinnbilder (Heroic Symbols), 1969, watercolour on paper, graphite, original*

photographs, illustrated photographs, postcards, and canvass strips on cardboard, 66 x 50 x 8.5 cm, 46 pages, private collection)

In the book „For Genet“ 1969, Kiefer plays with shifting identities: instead of wearing Nazi regalia like in previously analysed books, Kiefer appears here wearing dresses. Here again the ambience is purposefully staged. One can trace a discontinuity in the identity of the artist. He identifies with the so-called fathers' generation in imitating the Nazis, on the other hand, this imitation is a bitter irony and protest against the historically tainted “father.” The artist's identity is ambiguously divided, lost. Kiefer plays the role of a Nazi sacrificing his own subjectivity. According to Lisa Saltzman Kiefer's early „attempts to become a fascist“ are precisely an act of repetitive „identification“ with the paternal imago in order to occupy, enact and to understand the „madness“ as the artist himself mentioned. He inscribes himself as a victim of the historical and paternal legacy.¹ Kiefer introduced a figure, a self-representation that was iconoclastic, irreverent and provocative. He took up a paternal legacy and the role of the father as a means of negotiating his own identity in relation to history. By wearing dresses in the book „For Genet“ Kiefer thoroughly undermined the hyper masculine subjectivity of the Nazi. In „For Genet“ subjectivity oscillates between the two poles: one is the position of a Nazi, the other – of a cross-dresser. In invoking the figure of Jean Genet, a more ambiguous and ill-defined subjectivity emerges. For not only does the invocation of Genet introduce homosexuality, the repressed subtext of the „fascist unconscious,“ it introduces the issue of Genet's own ambivalence vis-à-vis Hitler and the fascists.

Kiefer's "Heroic Symbols" depicted the klischée image of a hero. The artist emphasised in this series of works among others the role of the medium of photography in dissemination of fascism in Germany, the medium that creates the effect of a hero from the trivial and insignificant. It is photography that makes a fake role-player appear like a hero or vice versa by means of minute manipulations. The photographs of Kiefer posing as a Nazi on the pages of his art books provoked heated debates when they were first published in Germany back in the 1970-s: a repressed image of “a hero” one inherits from history.

The book "Über Räume und Volker", 1976, (About Spaces and Peoples) thematises painting in "our time" - after World War II within the uneasy climate of the Cold War. One deals here with elements of appropriation art in this work. Anselm Kiefer appropriates here a geo-

¹ Lisa Saltzman, Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz, p. 65

political handbook, issued in Munich, in 1963 by the German-Atlantic Association. By shifting contexts and placing new accents one can trace the process of production of new meaning as a result of the artist's work on the book. The maps, diagrams, statistical data and texts presented in the book serve as the background for the artist's drawings of flourishing vegetation, dark apocalyptic visions of military devastation, warfare machines and pre-historic animals. The hand-book issued by NATO during the Cold War with comments from German Federal Republic Ministries of Defence, Economy and Development analyses the threat to peace in the world suggestively coming from the lands of the Warsaw Pact. The arrows indicate the antagonisms between the two blocks, segments of text are changed by Kiefer to make up new meaning, different from the one intended originally. The metamorphoses of spaces, time and peoples are rendered in drawing and in fragments of hand-written texts. The visual changes implemented by the artist parallel the implied political changes traceable on the world-maps in the book. The artist's drawings oscillate between the abstract linguistic and diagrammatic ways of rendering space. Schematic sketches of ships, bridges, brickwork, trees and dinosaurs in black are imposed upon the original official texts and maps of the NATO and Warsaw Pact territories. The process of disappearance of civilisation, threatened by the war, is made visually evident on the pages of the book by the gradual disappearance of the original texts and maps, beneath the layers of roughly applied drawings of wilderness, that blacken out the original images and render the medial surface as a densely sketched dark space.

Kiefer imitates the barbaric violence of war in his barbaric attitude to the book, which spells out political-ideological antagonisms in the form of maps, diagrams or relevant texts. Along with questioning mechanisms underlying politics within historical process, the artist questions the ability of a painter to adequately react to these. The format of a political brochure shows the discrepancy between the impersonal klischée style of the book and the personal, negative attitude of the painter to the ideological division of the world into power blocks of allies and enemies. The book conveys the artist's attempt to leave his individual trace upon the book, in the form of sketches and inscriptions.

Klaus Gallwitz compared the process of viewing this book from page to page with Kiefer's stroll over continents and times, like Emperor Alexander's march to the East, that changed the world map.¹ Kiefer in no way identifies himself with Alexander the Great since it is not his

¹ Klaus Gallwitz, Anselm Kiefer, *Über Räume und Völker*, p. 175

wish to change the real world maps, he rather renders in drawing the barbarism of the whole idea. The barbaric consequences of any forced military changes, rendered via the barbarity of the changes, he himself made to the book, stresses his ironic-negative attitude to the politics supporting such changes. Kiefer's act of overdrawing, blackening and deforming the original content of the NATO book is a sign of his protest against the impersonal, antagonistic politics of power blocks. By the roughly sketched images that turn the original texts and images into a blackened medial surface, Kiefer represents the barbaric side of contemporary civilisation and predicts eventual disappearance, the ultimate process of black desert replacing cities and states on the map.

Painting within the historical context is further analysed by Kiefer in the art book "Kyffhäuser" 1980. "Kyffhäuser is a source of myths of national rebirth, the place whence national consciousness draws on the cult of the dead. On the Kyffhäuser, a wooded range of mountains between Thuringia and the Harz Mountains ... are to be found the remains of Burg Kyffhausen, a castle of great importance in the eleventh century with a well 176 meters deep. As long ago as German Wars of Liberation (from Napoleon) it was the place of patriotic veneration; upon the founding of the Prussian Reich in 1871, the castle on the Kyffhäuser becomes the symbol of the return of Frederik Barbarossa's empire. (...The league Kyffhäuserbund was established in 1900 and enlarged in 1921 as the 'Deutscher Reichskriegsbund Kyffhäuser' (German Imperial Veteran's League) with four million members; disbanded after World War Two, but since re-admitted in the Federal Republic as the Kyffhäuserbund)."¹

In his book "Kyffhäuser" Kiefer analyses the ambiguous nature of painting that coexists with the violence in history. Like in "About Spaces and Peoples" in this book as well Kiefer appropriates the motives from old photographs creating the image of the "unknown soldier." He uses the technique of painting over and attaching layers of emulsion and shellac onto the medial surface, in order to disguise and distort the original images on the photographs and printed texts. The palette on a stock on the title page as well as the palette with wings, that is painted over photographs of burning landscapes later on the pages of the book, is depicted as insignificant. The palette is rendered as a timeless symbol of artistic creativity that is abused, estranged and threatened by the barbarities of history. Pages with a palette on a rope, threatened by fire, symbolise violence over which art has no power. Art, the essence of which

¹Jürgen Harten, Renata Sharp, Anselm Kiefer, p. 126

is mimesis, is only able to represent events, locations or protagonists, but it cannot influence the course of history for the better or for the worse. This fact ascribes a painter the role of creator of imitations, that supplement and skilfully duplicate reality.

Painting as a sacred aspect with beams around a palette on a stock appears desecrated and devalued, smeared with blots of colour pigment. The idea of art as a holy, pure aspect appears in the book overshadowed and buried under the burden of injustices, wars and devastation represented on the photos. The "grave of the unknown painter" is schematically represented on one of the double pages of the book. The commemoration of the dead hero - the "unknown painter", indicates, that not only painter but art itself might be dead: impartial to the barbarities of wars. Painting symbolised by the palette is represented in the book not as a window or a passage into the spiritual, pure or enlightening realm. On the contrary, painting is depicted isolated, walled off from the world, engraved beneath the thick brickwork. The brick wall of the Burg Kyffhausen, that appears in the book, acquires the meaning of the wall of misunderstanding, oblivion, isolation - it indicates the ultimate impossibility for painting to overcome the artistic dead-end and stagnation.

In "Kyffhäuser" Kiefer alludes to the contamination of art under the fascist regime, the contamination that has a continuous character, that is not ended with the actual demise of the fascist regime, but continues afterwards. The photograph of a monument to a dead Wehrmacht soldier, embodying for Kiefer the "unknown painter," stresses not the rebirth of a nation or of painting, as is the topic of the Kyffhäuser myth, but on the contrary - the degradation and death of painting and of art in general, that served the glorification of the murderous regime. Both books "Kyffhäuser" and "About Spaces and Peoples" emphasise the barbaric violence in history as a repetitive, continuous aspect, irrespective of epochs or geographical locations. *(Pic. 44. Kyffhäuser, 1980, acrylic, emulsion and shellac over original photographs on cardboard, 60 x 42 x 8 cm, 48 pages, Collection Francesco Clemente, New York)*

In the book "Das Deutsche Volksgesicht, Kohle für 2000 Jahre" (German Face, Coal for 2000 Years) the disappearance and moral degradation of a nation under the fascist rule is rendered as the gradual effacement and ultimate disappearance of a photographed image. Figurative images dissolve into abstractions, finally replaced by completely empty black squares of pages. The title alludes to the 2000 years of German Reich as the period of time during which the Germanic nation was supposed to prosper. The title simultaneously stresses the limited

time-span of the fascist rule in Germany. The pages of the book evidence the actual distortion and disappearance of the images symbolising a Germanic type. The initial black-and-white photographs of unknown randomly chosen people, were photographed to represent the Germanic spirit through the facial features and posture, the so-called faces of the nation were turned into propaganda icons. Appropriated by Kiefer these images are gradually overshadowed by the all-consuming black wood-grain pattern till there remains no image at all, and the figurative representation of the faces is effaced by the abstract wood patterns. The wood grain - a typically Germanic motive, is emphasised as the symbol of the barbaric aspect of the nation, it overwhelms the images and disfigures the faces into “faceless” abstractions. By the end of the book the faces are actually lost, the images are effaced under the layer of wood grain pattern drawn over them. (Pic. 45. *Das Deutsche Volksgesicht, Kohle für 2000 Jahre /The German Face, Coals for 2000 Years/*, 1974, bounded original photos, emulsion and charcoal, iron oxide and linseed oil on wood-chip paper, 57 x 45 x 6 cm, 182 pages, private collection)

Chapter V

Pictura Poesis

"Schöner als die Sterne, die berühmten Orden der Nacht, viel schöner als der feurige Auftritt eines Kometen,"¹ - Kiefer's paintings of the night skies and of plants are related to poetry. Both the poems and the canvases express the fascination with the heavenly infinity dotted with stars and the mystery of plants. These images inspired by Bachmann convey the sense of timelessness: "Your age and mine and the age of the world," - the lines from Bachmann's poem "The Game is Over" are the title of Kiefer's monumental painting with sunflowers, (280 x 560 cm) made in 1996. These are not the lively yellow sunflowers from Kiefer's Barjac farm, or the sunflowers of Vincent van Gogh. These are giant black plants with seeds like dead stars on the white sky. The poetic metaphor expresses the incompatibility of the scale and dimension of the universal time to the time on earth, which results in the inability to understand either the mysteries of plants or of the universe and the only possibility to render these in poetic language. The black sunflowers appear as constellations of primordial plants containing a mysterious animé, which is eternal and is the component of the collective subconscious.

The melancholic dried plants are represented by Kiefer as both the microcosm and the macrocosm, the dark and the unknown, that Ingeborg Bachmann conveyed in her poem. As member of literary "Gruppe 47", Bachmann maintained that a new world could not be built without a "new language." At the same time she questioned the feasibility of producing literature in the world after the catastrophes of fascism. Bachmann's "new language" is that of unexpected metaphors, unusual figures of speech that introduce image into language. Kiefer transfers the words of poetry into painted images.

In Kiefer's works figuration in painting parallels figuration in speech. Both are languages that mirror each other. The books, photographs and paintings dedicated to Paul Celan, realised in various media, generate multiple interpretation allowing comparison of concepts contained in language, in photography and in painting. "The photographic material, processed in various

¹ Ingeborg Bachmann, „Anrufung des Großen Bären“, p. 20

ways and manipulated by all kinds of interventions, is Kiefer's most essential substratum, basic to all his image media. The transient medium of photography, momentary substitute for reality ... became the actual basis for reality on to which all manner of layers of material and meaning are applied. ... Traces of the photographic process on document paper can be overlaid with oil or acrylic paint or glue-bound distemper, with inks or charcoal, smeared with clay, ash or sand ..." ¹ Analysing Celan's motives in Anselm Kiefer's painting Theo Buck mentioned that in Kiefer's works one deals with "image being text being image, which corresponds to the transformation of Celan's lyric motives in Kiefer's painting." ²

While viewing Kiefer's paintings the correlation of reading and seeing is important. The inscribed letters appear to contain aspects of divine revelation in terms of their visual aspect and the contained meaning. Paintings, based on photographs and inspired by literature, are related to language and its metaphors. Like in the works of Cy Twombly with scribbles scattered all over the canvas surfaces, inscriptions in Kiefer's paintings demonstrate writing as the human trace, verging on the unintelligible. They represent the aspect of memory, civilisation, the obsolete, archaic aspects of language. Kiefer emphasises historicity of language which in spite of its archaic character outlives physical matter, subject to evident entropie: e.g. corroded blocks of concrete, soldered lead, splinters of clay or glass.

Kiefer renders language as the oldest medium for storage of human knowledge. For example in the books dedicated to Paul Celan, "Das Lied von der Zeder - für Paul Celan," (The Song of Cedar - for Paul Celan), 2005, or in "Paul Celan - Jakobs Himmlisches Blut Benedeiet von Äxten" (Jacob's Heavenly Blood Blessed by the Axes), 2005, inscriptions are made over the surfaces of the photographs that make up the pages of the book. The letters make up a complex ornament-like layer over the photographs. Written texts are combined with the black-and-white photos of the snow-covered winter fields that appear like white sheets of paper on which the human trace is left in the form of writing.

Inscriptions upon the paintings' and photo surfaces are allusions to letters as sacred symbols that are valuable for their formal, ornamental aspect as well as for the meaning they convey. Letters are rendered as sacred, "blessed" images. The sacred aspect of the letters corresponds to the "heavenly blood of Jacob" that is supposed to nurture the deserted land with Biblical

¹ Götz Adriani, *Anselm Kiefer für Paul Celan*, p. 9

² Theo Buck, *Bildersprache, Celans Motives bei Lazlo Lakner und Anselm Kiefer*, p. 43

message. At the same time the landscapes on which inscriptions are made create a sense of extreme isolation, estrangement. There is no harmony between the texts written over the landscapes and the nature, but a sense of silent misunderstanding verging on estrangement: a contradiction between the message of the texts and the indifference of nature is evident. Formally the contradiction is evident in the disparity between the medium of representation - photography/painting and writing imposed on the image.

Both the written texts and the landscapes allude to mourning but the two do not correlate. The mourning implied in the citations from Paul Celan relates to human tragedies – e.g. the Holocaust, whereas the mourning of nature is caused by its inability to communicate or to be understood. Therefore it is impossible for the spectator to unravel the secrets of nature and the plants will always remain a mystery. Roland Barthes, commenting upon the peculiarities of language also used the concept of a certain mystery related to the (*im*)possibilities of communication: „To reach the 'essence' of the work, then this essence is the subject itself, or the absence. Each metaphor is a sign without any 'essence,' it is exactly this distance of the meaning, that is designated via the fullness of the symbol ... it gives the work simultaneously the hidden and the objective meaning ... the endless metaphor of the work ... the highest mystery, that as soon as it were unravelled could not be added any more. What one can also ... say about a work always remains at first glance a mode of speaking, a subject, an absence."¹

Kiefer's interpretation of mythology and of Celan's poetry is translated into painting that verges on writing. He analyses the nature of language and compares it to the nature of representation. Writing is in Kiefer's works a hardly readable "runic web" (Runen Gespinst, Celan), the way it appears in Kiefer's photographs, paintings and sculptures dedicated to Paul Celan writing is the storage of memory. On the one hand "runic" is related to the Nordic aspect of German language exploited by the Nazi regime, on the other hand, it is the language in which Paul Celan, the victim of this regime, wrote his poetry.

The illusory web (Gespinst) of the runes implies that both aspects, the destructive barbaric

¹ "Den 'Grund' des Werkes zu erreichen, denn dieser Grund ist das Subjekt selbst, also eine Absenz. Jede Metapher ist ein Zeichen ohne „Grund“ gerade dieses Fernsein des Bedeuteten wird durch die Fülle der Symbole bezeichnet ... es gibt im Werk ein gleichsam vergrabenes und objektives Bedeutetes ... die unendliche Metapher des Werkes ... ein höchstes Geheimnis, dem sobald es entdeckt wäre, ebenfalls nichts mehr hinzuzufügen wäre. Was man auch von einem ... Werk sagen mag, es bleibt ihm immer wie in seinem ersten Augenblick Redeweise, Subjekt, Absenz," Roland Barthes, Kritik und Wahrheit, pp. 83-84

and the poetic, coexist in a language forming a complex ambiguous medium, where the violence of history is inscribed side by side with the artistic, ecstatic, emotional aspect. Kiefer analyses the nature of language which apart from its secular aspects is also the medium of communication between the earthly and the divine, the medium in which the Bible and the myths were recorded. From the ambiguous nature of the language represented as a "runic web" the artist emphasises this sacred "blessed" aspect paralleled by images in painting. The complexity of the language as medium is translated in Kiefer's works into the complexity of representation, for example the surfaces of his paintings where various layers of matter are imposed on one another and attached to the medial support: acrylic, charcoal, branches, lead strings on photos mounted on cardboard or on canvas, as in the book "Paul Celan - Jakobs Himmlisches Blut Benediet von Äxten" (2005).

(Pic. 46. "Paul Celan - Jakobs Himmlisches Blut Benediet von Äxten" /Jacob's Heavenly Blood Blessed by the Axes/, 2005, acrylic, charcoal, branches, lead, string on photography on cardboard, 54 pages, 66 x 44 x 10 cm)

The hidden mystic aspects of language were researched by Kabbalists, whose doctrines found reflection in Kiefer's paintings. Through the mystical study of the Scripture the Kabbalists could see the divine light hidden in the text, the letters themselves according to the Kabbala teaching were nothing but the configurations of the divine light.¹

Kiefer's paintings with runes as abstract ornamental elements scattered over the canvas surfaces analyse language not as profane "item on sale" (Boris Groys, Communist Post-Scriptum) but as the archaic medium that is partly related to the secular world but mostly unintelligible to those not initiated into heavenly mysteries. The use of Biblical names, allusions to mythological characters, archaic phrases, that are out of use in contemporary speech deprive the language of its routine functional tasks of mere communication and emphasise it as a "web" of scriptures where the past and the present are imposed upon each other. The aspect of time is emphasised in the use of archaic linguistic terms that correspond to the image of the lead books that due to special treatment of lead also appear archaic. The apparent lightness of the archaic "runic web" is counterpointed by the heaviness of the lead books that actually make up the sculpture.

Sometimes the written quotations are scattered all over the surface of the photograph or

¹ Elliot R. Wolfson, Through a Speculum that Shines, p. 375, Zohar 3:202

painting, sometimes text is written in the upper part as in "Wach im Zigeunerlager", 2005. Kiefer reintroduces in his work the tradition of the *pictura poesis* which was practised by classic art. The microcosm of the book corresponds to the macrocosm of the world as in the painting "Für Paul Celan" (2005) with a lead book attached to the canvas. The two aspects: writing symbolised by the book and painting are the two ways of representing the world. In Kiefer's works the physical world is represented as transient, whereas language as a continuous aspect of civilisation. Language in Kiefer's oeuvre is the medium one of the functions of which is the storage of memory. After the catastrophe of the Holocaust, for example, it was the language that remained to commemorate those who were gone. Therefore the strophes from Celan commemorating the dead contradict the violence of history and, inscribed over the empty landscapes, remain forever imprinted in the reader's memory.

"Not only it is not possible to handle literature as any other random product of history, the particularity of the work counterpoints history to a certain extent; a work is of an essentially more paradox nature, it is a sign for history and simultaneously an opposition to it ... to write means to shock the world, to bring up an indirect question, answering which is denied to the writer. The answer is given by anyone of us bringing up our own history, language, freedom; and since history, language and freedom are constantly changing, the answer of the world to a writer never ends: one never stops to give an answer, to whatever has been written beyond all answers..."¹ (Pic. 47. *Espenbaum - für Paul Celan /Aspen Tree – for Paul Celan/, 2005, oil, emulsion, acrylic, charcoal, plaster, resin, hair, lead string, branches on canvas, 190 x 280 cm*)

The *seen* and the *read* in Kiefer's paintings, books and installations create a certain dialectics revealing a profound kinship of the language to the world, a kinship that in primordial times was even more evident. To create the illusion of this mysterious archaic aura Kiefer subjects his materials to special treatment: oxidation, burning, sedimentation, cutting, fissuring. The written message combined with the painted one is to convey the otherwise unspeakable and

¹ Nicht nur kann man die Literatur wie irgendein beliebiges anderes Produkt der Geschichte behandeln, die Besonderheit des Werkes widerspricht außerdem in gewissem Maße der Geschichte; das Werk ist wesentlich paradoxer Natur, es ist Zeichen für die Geschichte und zugleich Widerstand gegen sie ... Schreiben heißt, den Sinn der Welt erschüttern, eine indirekte Frage in ihr aufwerfen, auf die zu antworten der Schriftsteller wie in einem Letztem Aufschub sich untersagt. Die Antwort gibt jeder von uns unter Beibringung seiner eigenen Geschichte, seiner Sprache, seiner Freiheit; da jedoch Geschichte, Sprache und Freiheit sich unablässig ändern, ist die Antwort der Welt auf einen Schriftsteller nie beendet: man hört nie auf, eine Antwort auf das zu geben, was außerhalb aller Antwort geschrieben wurde...“ Roland Barthes, *Kritik und Wahrheit*, p. 11

the timeless.

Martin Heidegger wrote about the two aspects of word - „word as logos and word as myth“. “Logos as a certain experience and frame of the essence of language ... The Greeks know only the second and the older meaning: the language and the word as myth. As myth is the word above the humans, it indicates the direction, the totality of being, not the word through which one speaks of oneself, but the word that gives direction. Word as myth provides instruction and meaning; word as logos seizes and sets clarity about itself and the people ... the original logos of philosophy remains related to myth.”¹ Kiefer analyses in his works mythologies within historical perspective. By representing episodes from Teutonic myths, e.g. "Siegfried's Difficult Way to Brunhild," "Parsifal" he questions the concept of the heroic, its interpretation in ancient myths counterpointing it to the heroic images from history.

He presents the relativity of this concept, with the hero appearing ambiguous, the heroic ideals questionable, distorted by political ideologies. The poetic representation of the heroic aspect in the language of the myths is opposed in Kiefer's "Heroic Symbols" by the images of the heroic that are grotesque, false. Kiefer also shows that the metaphoric language of mythology appears to unveil certain universal truths, which still remain relevant. Mythological texts are treated as *corpus symbolicum* that contains revelation, as for example Kabbala mythology. In the painting "Die Entfaltung der Sefirot" (Unfolding of Sefirot) there is an impression as if a lead curtain is raised revealing whatever is hidden beneath it. The names of the Sefirot are written on pieces of paper attached to lead stones hanging on cords. Yet the revelation implied in this mysterious "unfolding" is illusive. The layer beneath the rugged lead curtain remains unreadable and abstract, whatever is beyond it, is as vague and unknown as ever.

According to Kabbalists the writings of the Old Testament, the sacred scrolls, were perceived as the patterns of the divine. The language of the Bible abounds in tropes: comparisons, hyperbolas, metaphors. Kiefer emphasises in his paintings that the message of a myth is hidden, it is supposed to reveal universal truths, but it is ambiguous, opaque, beyond precise

¹ „Sprache als Logos und als Mythos, Logos als ganz bestimmte Erfahrung und Fassung des Wesens der Sprache. Die Griechen kennen nur eine zweite und ältere: die Sprache und das Wort als Mythos. Als Mythos ist das Wort das über den Menschen kommt jenes worin ihm dieses und jenes seines Gesamtdaseins gedeutet wird, nicht das Wort in dem er von sich der Rede steht, sondern das Wort das Weisung gibt. Das Wort als Mythos gibt Anweisung und deutet; das Wort als Logos greift zu und setzt sich und den Menschen ins klare ... der ursprüngliche Logos der Philosophie bleibt dem Mythos verbunden,“ Martin Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe, Band 36/37, pp. 116-117

understanding or any direct meaning, particularly the esoteric texts of Jewish mysticism. According to Daniel Arasse Kiefer's "Break of Vessels" related to the Kabbala myth of creation represents the general breakdown, "collapse of myth in history," (Zusammenbruch des Mythos in der Geschichte) which medieval Kabbalist Isaak Luria "derived from the myth of creation itself, rendering the absence of meaning and of reason for creation in the world ... and opening simultaneously the way to the poetics of exile."¹

For Anselm Kiefer who shares the melancholy of Walter Benjamin's "angel of history" and whose works are influenced by the Kabbala "the history of men is the history of *Tikkun* (in Jewish Messianism the term for recovery and restitution), that is the history of the failed *Tikkun*."²

Combining poetic language with painting Kiefer renders the absence of any positive meaning in history except for the progress towards final destruction as conveyed in paintings "Wach im Zigeunerlager und wach im Wustenzelt. Es rinnt uns der Sand aus den Haaren," (1997), "Sternen-Lager II", (1988), "Varus" (1976), "Sonnenreste," "Ninife". Kiefer's role as an artist is to demonstrate this inevitable process of degradation which cannot be delayed or stopped by art. By specially choosing for his works materials that bear evident traces of corrosion he indicates the transience of his works indicating the transience of the world itself counterpointed with the constant will to create in spite of the knowledge of inevitable destruction.

Linguistic elements replace painted images in Kiefer's works partly as the acknowledgement of the prohibition of creation of an image proclaimed in the Old Testament and partly due to the Kabbala tradition according to which the exegesis of the Old Testament was a means to re-experience the seeing of God. Within the Kabbala tradition the study of the Scripture involved linking of texts to texts. Through the process of interpretation of the holy texts epiphany was relived. The revelatory status of Scriptural interpretation was a central component in medieval Jewish mysticism. Reading Scripture was a form of iconic visualisation. Gnosis of the divine was attained through study of the sacred texts. Image, however, remains important in Kiefer's approach: "My understanding of a text is only complete when I can make an image of it. The process of spiritual knowledge is almost purely visual for me."³

¹ D. Arasse, Anselm Kiefer, p. 206

² Ouaknin, p. 200, cited after D. Arasse, Anselm Kiefer, p. 222

³ Michael Auping, Interview with Anselm Kiefer, Heaven and Earth, p. 46

Kiefer in his canvases visualises the complex concepts of the Kabbala by means of writing them mainly in original Hebraic with Latin letters on the canvas surfaces and schematically rendering abstract notions implied by the Kabbala texts as in "The Sefirot," 1996, where the names of the Sefirot are written all over the canvas and connected to the schematically sketched tree of knowledge dominating the painting's composition. Sefirot – the attributes of God are the most important figures of speech that come across in the Kabbala. "Scholem gives a very exhausting list of Kabbala synonyms for the Sefirot: expressions, names, lights, forces, crowns, properties, stages, garments, mirror, origins, the first days, aspects, inner faces, and the God's limbs. Rhetorically one can claim, that they cover a whole range of classical tropes, including metaphors, metonymy, synecdoche and hyperbole."¹ Kiefer in his works refers to the complexity of the Sefirot meanings. In the paintings "Schebirat ha-Kelim," for example and in "Sefirot" one can see ash-covered garments with the names of the Sefirot handwritten on the sleeves and on the pockets. In the painting "Sefirot," the written names of the divine emanations are scattered all over the canvas surface. The handwritten inscriptions form a complex abstract texture of the painting. The "tree of knowledge" is depicted as an ill-balanced tower with the Sefirot names handwritten around it arranged in a certain order. Although the names and the approximate meanings of the Sefirot are more or less known, their entire complex meaning cannot be adequately translated: the highest crown is "Kether," the original idea is "Chochma," the intelligence is "Bina," the love is "Chesed," the punishing violence is "Din," the mercy is "Tifereth," the continuity is "Nezach," the majesty is "Chod," the basis is "Jesod," the archetypal principle of kingdom of Israel - "Malchut."² (*Pic. 48. Die Sefiroth, 1996, 330 x 180 cm, emulsion, acrylic, charcoal, shellac on canvas, private collection*)

The real meaning of the Kabbala parables remains elusive. Painting verging on writing created by an artist cannot fully convey the meaning of the Sefirot. They are rendered by Kiefer abstract as language, beyond understanding and beyond representation. Images of the Sefirot are often replaced by indication of their names. The artist thus prefers inscriptions to a painted image stressing that writing underlies speech and speech in turn underlies thought. One gets the impression that in Kiefer's works what we see are "ruins of meaning and ruins of

¹ Scholem gibt eine sehr aufschlußreiche Liste von kabbalistischen Synonymen für die Sefirot: Aussprüche, Namen, Lichter, Mächte, Kronen, Eigenschaften, Stufen, Gewänder, Spiegel, Sprosse, Ursprünge, Ertse Tage, Aspekte, innere Gesichter, und Glieder Gottes. Rhetorisch, so läßt sich feststellen decken sie das ganze Reich der klassischen Trope ab, einschließlich Metapher, Metonymie, Synekdoche und Hyperbole, "Harold Bloom, Kabbala: Poesie und Kritik, p. 21

² Doreet LeVitté-Harten in Anselm Kiefer, Exhibition Catalogue, National Gallery, Berlin, 1991, p. 23

art.”¹

In the tradition of Kabbala mysticism speech and writing partially converge, the two processes were considered as integrated rather than opposed. “Here it seems that the idea of the spoken word becoming inscribed in the air, issuing from the mouth of the person uttering it, was applied to the primordial processes of the creative divine speech.”² On the relation between the verbal and the graphic aspects of language mysticism in the Provençal Kabbala Scholem emphasises that, for the kabbalist, every act of speech is at the same time an act of writing and vice-versa.³

Tiqqun (restitution) is interpreted as arranging the divine name in its proper order: such as the seventy-two-letter name derived from Exod, 14:19-21. *Tiqqun* is to know the (divine) name as it is written ... to combine it in the alphabet ... to know the computation (of the letters) so that one will not err with respect to the computation of the letters. The phonetic as opposed to the graphic aspect of the technique of letter combination (applied as a mystical praxis) is important in the Kabbala practices. Some mystical sources in fact emphasise the oral over the graphic as the primary mode of divine creativity. Accordingly cosmological process entails five stages of linguistic activity connected to the divine name. The term *tiqqun/tiqqen* is used in the sense of linguistic activity, letter combination.⁴ For the Kabbalists linguistic mysticism is at the same time a mysticism of writing. Every act of speaking ... is at once an act of writing and every writing is potential speech. The forms of Hebrew letters, their alphabetic order, the order of letter combination in words are not accidental but subject to certain laws that represent the universal order and therefore are essential.

The secret of the letters thus instructs one about the secret of creation. The letters in the Kabbala are the cause of every matter and the foundation of every matter. The fourth path of interpreting the alphabet, called the hidden way, stated that the letters are divided into three groups and correlated with the different spheres in reality, the intelligible (or angelic), the heavenly and the terrestrial. The underlying principle here is that the Hebrew letters are indicative of the very nature of reality. The linguistic process of combining letters and rotation

¹ Daniel Arasse. Anselm Kiefer, p. 306

² Gershom Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 313-332

³ *Ibid.* p. 277

⁴ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, cited after Judah ben Barzillai, *Perush Sefer Yesirah*, p. 277

of words was discussed by Kabbalists as the primary act of divine creativity, as well as vocalisation of different combinations of letters. For Kabbalists *tikkun* meant a complicated process that would bring forth the word in the utterance, and the utterance in the word, the *tiqqun* in the permutation, the combination in the computation and the computation in the combination, until all the words are placed in front of the flame.¹ (*Pic. 49. Die Entfaltung der Sefiroth (The Unfolding of Sefiroth), 1985- 1988, 340 x 690 cm, oil, acrylic, emulsion, soil and ash on canvas with lead, roof gutters, photo fragments*)

Anselm Kiefer does not inscribe Hebraic letters onto his canvases, nor does he attempt to calculate the divine name when he represents vast cosmic spaces with numbers and letters scattered all over abstract paintings, e.g. in pictures "Contrainte de Lumiere," 1999, or in "Chute d'étoiles." However he is inspired by Kabbala mythology, which he translates into complex imagery of his monumental paintings. If he as an artist is not able to unravel the divine mysteries, he sees the aim of his work at least in translating the language of the ancient myths dealing with these mysteries into impressive, emotionally charged images, that take the spectator from the usual surroundings of the profane world and for a certain time place an individual in front of the painted semblance of the cosmic, higher order, making visible the invisible hidden aspects. The use of the terms in original Hebrew language written in Latin letters: e.g. "Daath", "Merkawa", "Shevirat-ha-Kelim", "Zim-Zum" or the inscriptions of combinations of numbers is the attempt to create the distant aura of the ancient language where letters corresponded to numbers and concealed the divine revelation. "In its original form when it was given to men by God himself, language was an absolutely certain and transparent sign for things, because it resembled them. The names of things were lodged in the things they designated ... by the form of similitude. This transparency was destroyed at Babel as a punishment for men. Languages became separated and incompatible with one another only insofar as they had previously lost this original resemblance to the things that had been the prime reason for the existence of language. There is only one language that retains a memory of that similitude because it derives in direct descent from that first vocabulary which is now forgotten; because God did not wish men to forget the punishment inflicted at Babel; because this language had to be used to recount God's ancient Alliance with his people; and lastly, because it was in this language that God addressed himself to those who listened to him. Hebrew therefore contains as if in the form of fragments, the marks of that original name-giving, and all those words have endured, in part at least, and still carry with

¹ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Circle in the Square*, pp. 169-173

them in their density an embedded fragment of silent knowledge, the unchanging properties of being.”¹

Kiefer in his turn creates the illusion of revelation through art by giving his paintings the names in ancient Hebraic language. However the discrepancy between the original immanent meaning of the Hebraic terms and their representation in writing with Latin letters and in schematic imagery, the inability to render the hidden meaning of the sacred words in art or in writing is the subject of Kiefer's artistic melancholy. Painting, sculpture or photography created by an artist might refer to the original hidden meaning but they are not able to reveal the original mystic knowledge. Kiefer renders a certain appearance of revelation via painting, yet the effect of revelation is illusive, the words do not reveal much to someone not initiated into the secrets of Kabbala mysticism, neither do the images. Kiefer's works are emotionally charged, poetic. They leave the spectator disturbed by their sheer size and the feeling of melancholy. The esoteric knowledge implied in these works has no relevance to the profane world or to the course of human history which is brutal and violent.

Some of the paintings e.g. "Emanations" (Ausgießungen) thematise the divine aspect pouring out, becoming visible. "Emanations" are rendered as lead, cloud-like columns amid landscapes with low horizons. Emanations are supposed to reveal, yet, the opaque, grey, lead stripes symbolising "emanations" hide more than they reveal. Kiefer demonstrates the illusion of mystic revelation made possible by means of art. Painting is charged with the task of representing the invisible divine aspect made visible on a painter's canvas in the form of lead stripes. Whatever is revealed here is the process of the artist's work, the bodily traces upon the medial support, the lead melted and applied to canvas.

According to Gershom Scholem the twenty-two letters of the Hebraic alphabet are the attributes and the various names of God. The text of the Old Testament itself is supposed to contain revelation in its words when properly deciphered. All Kabbala theories of emanation are also linguistic theories. Scholem says: "God, who reveals Himself is also God who speaks", which means, that the Sefirot are primarily speech, the attribute of God, that have to be described with various divine names, when He is involved in his creative work. Sefirot are complex figurations ..., tropes or linguistic turns, that replace God. One could also say, that Sefirot are like poems, as far as they are names, that contain such complex commentaries that

¹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 40

they can form texts."¹

The dark grey clouds of melted lead on canvases or photo-paper representing emanations seem to visualise the aspect beyond representation that can only be named in language, yet this naming is ambiguous. It is not light that emanations are supposed to bring to the photographed landscapes but darkness, since they overcast the sky with clouds of lead. These lonely landscapes are universal landscapes, they do not indicate any particular location. One cannot identify these topographies, similarly it is hardly possible to see through the lead cloud applied to canvas, it conceals the essence of the divine emanations. "The absolute relationship of the name to cognition is concealed only in God, only in Him is the name the pure medium of cognition, because it is identical with the creative word. This means: God created things that could be revealed through their names. People however name things according to their own knowledge."²

By writing terms from the Kabbala upon his canvases it is as if Kiefer attempts by means of combining painting and language to reconstitute the very order of the universe, reveal its mysteries. Although this task is apparently doomed to failure and the artist can only create an illusion of divine revelation, Kiefer sees the task of painting in indicating the discrepancies between the common and divine language, between the language of painting counterpointed with the linguistic metaphors from the Kabbala.

The installation titled „Shevirat ha-Kelim“, (The Shattering of Vessels), 2000, contains six monumental lead paintings placed in the arched niches of a chapel at La Salpêtrier Hospital in Paris. According to Gershom Scholem "the breaking of the vessels continues into all further stages of emanation and Creation; everything is in some way broken, everything has a flaw, everything is unfinished."³ The disharmony evident in the material world can be ascribed to

¹ Alle kabbalistischen Emanationstheorien auch Sprachtheorien sind. Scholem sagt: 'der Gott, der sich selbst offenbart, ist auch der Gott, der sich äußert', das bedeutet, die Sefirot sind primär Sprache, Attribute Gottes, die mit den verschiedenen Namen Gottes beschrieben werden müssen, wenn er bei seinem Schöpfungswerk tätig ist. Die Sefirot sind komplexe Figurationen für Gott, Tropen oder Sprachwendungen, die an Gottes Stelle treten, Man könnte sogar sagen, dass die Sefirot wie Gedichte sind, insofern sie Namen sind, die so komplexe Kommentaren enthalten, dass aus ihnen Texte werden," Harold Bloom, „Kabbala: Poesie und Kritik“, p. 21

² "Das absolute Verhältnis des Namens zur Erkenntnis besteht allein in Gott, nur dort ist der Name, weil er im innersten mit dem Schaffenden Wort identisch ist, das reine Medium der Erkenntnis. Das heißt: Gott machte die Dinge in ihren Namen erkennbar. Der Mensch aber benennt sie maßen der Erkenntnis," - Walter Benjamin, *Medienästhetische Schriften*, p. 74

³ Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Manheim, New York: Schocken Books, 1996, pp. 112-13, cited after M. Auping, Anselm Kiefer, *Heaven and Earth*, p. 46

two momentous events: the original constriction (Tsim-Tsum) and the shattering of the vessels. According to Kabbala God's constriction was necessary in order to make room for the world. This constriction however, concealed the divine essence, creating a profound division between God and people, which resulted in a dark, vacant space. "Tsim Tsum could in fact be understood as a metaphor for the creative process, in which the artist withdraws into himself in order to render a new image of the condition of the world. ... In this later stage in creation, the divine light emanates, shattering ten vessels that were meant to contain it."¹

In the installation „Shevirat ha-Kelim“ special accent is made not on the divine light but on the process of shattering, dissonant break, which for the artist mirrors the condition of the world. Here Kiefer sees his task as an artist not in revealing the concealed divine essence, which is inconceivable and beyond representation, but in making evident the process of the break, the disharmony, the unfinished, imperfect condition. The installation itself looks as if unfinished, requiring additional work of the artist to complete it. An art work in the process of creation is meant by the artist to refer to the world in creation: waiting to be perfected. The installation conveys silent melancholy over the shattered condition.

In the painting "Zim Zum" the divine constriction is rendered as the break up of traditional picture plane into layers of canvas, lead and ash superimposed upon each other. The break up of the initial divine harmony is translated into the modernist break up of the form into abstraction, the break up of the traditional unity of the picture surface by imposing different materials upon the medial support, laying bare the process of creation of the painting itself, which corresponds to the imitation of the divine act of creation. The sheets of lead and canvas superimposed upon one another create the frame within the frame as if framing off the worlds from each other. "Zim-Zum" contains a picture within a picture within a picture, like the world within a world, where the divine cannot be differentiated from the profane. The mysterious light emanating from below makes the primordial landscape even more obscure and ambiguous. The deep vanishing perspective is counterpointed with the pronounced flatness of the medial surface with an inscription above and sheets of lead imposed onto the canvas. The oscillation between the emphasised flatness of the painting and its perspective leading into mysterious depths produces a special dynamics of movement that imitates the dynamics of contraction and expansion, creation and destruction. The avant-garde technique of cutting up and destroying traditional picture plane corresponds to the divine act of

¹ M. Auping, Anselm Kiefer, Heaven and Earth, p. 46

constriction and destruction of the worlds existing before as the Kabbala mythology has it. (Pic. 50. *Zim-Zum*, 1990, 380 x 560 cm, oil, emulsion, shellac, crayon, ash on canvas on lead, National Gallery, Washington)

According to Sabine Schutz many of Kiefer's works are to a great extent linguistic. "... The linguistic aspect of Kiefer's works sets a network of cultural connotations. Single words and concepts, apocryphal titles and citations lend his works a narrative character, that can sometimes be identified with relevant cultural contexts. The verbalisation of the work through a commentary acts like a kind of catalyst between the "seen" and the "spoken", thus extending the work, making it vivid and open for interpretation in future.¹

The technique of covering the paintings' surfaces with palimpsest-like inscriptions plays a significant role in the series of works called "*Etroits sont les vaisseaux*" /The Narrow Vessels/ (2002). These are abstract over-painted photographs with hair attached to the surface representing photos of wavy constructions of concrete, floating against the grey background. The surfaces of these works are covered with inscriptions. The curves of the written letters are repeated in the curved contours of the concrete structures reiterated by the curves of the black hair applied to the medial surface. Both the hair and the handwritten inscriptions form a human, bodily trace upon the grey abstract surface. These inscriptions provide an illusion of the ultimate revelation and cognition through language, translated into the artistic process of projecting onto the canvas images of written words over opaque surfaces.

The inscriptions leave a hardly readable trace of human presence. Yet they hide more than they reveal, since the words are hardly decipherable. The inscriptions make up a complicated abstract texture of the picture surface filled with patterns of signs, the ultimate meaning of which is hardly readable.

The Ladder and the Labyrinth

Daniel Arasse compared Kiefer's body of work to a labyrinth: "The more one gets in touch with his work and the better one gets to know them, the more one feels that one has to deal with a labyrinth, that progresses in volume and versatility and its unity and totality can only

¹ Sabine Schütz, Anselm Kiefer, *Geschichte als Material, Arbeiten 1969-1983*, pp. 43-51

be compared to uncertainty with which the interpreter has to go through it.”¹

The motives of the labyrinth, the spirals and the ladder emerge in Kiefer's paintings: "Heavenly Palaces", 2002, "Sefiroth", 2002, "Himmelsleiter", 2002, "Sefer Hechaloth", 2002, "Aaron", 1979, "The Heavenly Palaces", 2002, "Nagpur", 2003. Representations of the firmament, charged with the symbolic meaning of the topography of the divine, transcendental and timeless, are crossed with lines and marked with spirals that remind the complicated ways of some mysterious labyrinth. Artistic practice itself has been defined by Kiefer as a complicated way towards the ambiguous unattainable inner realm: "art is always a detour around something unspeakable, around a black hole or a crater, whose centre one cannot enter."² Spirals, elliptical forms, circles spreading across the backdrop of the cosmic emptiness imitate the macrocosmic motion patterns of celestial bodies. The cosmic spaces, the sky, that from times immemorial has been vested with the meaning of the sacral and the unchangeable, is represented by the artist as the topography of the unknown, rendered in sombre colours. The pictures draw the spectator into a maze of lines and circles that is characterised by ambivalence: orientation and disorientation, repetition, pendulum movement forward and backward, error, change of direction. One visually follows a way that is at times the maximal possible detour leading to the centre.

In "Himmelsleiter" (Heavenly Stair) for example and in "Sefer Hechaloth" numbers and number combinations appear side by side with letters scattered all over the canvas making the impression of a calculable universe. According to Kiefer himself the numbers are taken from the NASA and contain scientific information about the stars. Yet the numbers handwritten by Kiefer onto his canvases only create the appearance of precision, the information they carry is vague, it causes more confusion than clarity. The spectator facing such a profusion of inscriptions feels shocked, overwhelmed by the sheer dimensions of the paintings that imitate the dimensions of the endless and timeless firmament. Kiefer's representation of the sky evokes the sense of veneration towards it, since the sky has always been related to the sacral

¹ "Je mehr man sich mit seinem Werk vertraut macht und je besser man sich in ihm auskennt, desto mehr stellt sich das Gefühl ein, es mit einer Art von Labyrinth zu tun zu haben, das fortschreitend am Umfang und Vielschichtigkeit gewinnt und dessen Einheit und Gesamtzusammenhang nur der Unsicherheit vergleichbar ist, mit welcher der Interpret, der sich im stellen will, es durchläuft," Daniel Arasse, Anselm Kiefer, p. 19

² Kunst ist ja immer nur ein herumgehen um etwas unsagbares, um ein schwarzes Loch oder um einen Krater, dessen Zentrum man nicht betreten kann,“ Anselm Kiefer, National Gallery, Berlin, 1991, p. 100, quoted from Axel Hecht, Alfred Nemecek: „Bei Anselm Kiefer im Atelier“, p. 40

and to the divine.¹

The universe rendered by Kiefer as a labyrinth appears inconceivable and incalculable. The motive of stairs comes up often in the pictures. "I am forever on the great stair that leads up ... On that infinitely wide and spacious stair I clamber about, sometimes up, sometimes down, sometimes on the right, sometimes on the left, always in motion."² In "Sefer Hechaloth" and "2 Ikosaeder" Kiefer inscribed numbers at the stairs leading deep into the perspective. The art book "Sefer Hechaloth" as the microcosm corresponds to the cosmic space surrounding it - the macrocosm. In this work the artist attached to the canvas not an open book, but a sequence of closed, burnt books as if indicating that the universe remains a closed, impenetrable and inconceivable for the human mind. In the universe rendered by Kiefer the way up cannot be differentiated from the way down. There is no right or wrong direction, the cycles of the spiral movement are set in a continuous repetitive rhythm.

The symbolism of the sky as the destination of ascent has been of essential importance in ancient mythologies. From immemorial times the concept of ascent to the skies was identified with the elevation to the divine realm, the elevation that was intended only for the chosen ones. In representing the ladder, steps and stairs as the means of the ascent to the sky Kiefer refers to these centuries-old religious symbols of rise step by step towards the heavenly, divine realms. The ascension to the heavens used to be part of the Orphic Initiation ritual of ceremonial climbing of a ladder. (cf. A. B. Cook, l.c. Vol. 2 p. 124f.). In the Mithra-initiations one finds this ritual for sure; the ceremonial ladder (climax) used to have seven steps, each of which was made of different metals. According to Celsus (Origenes, Contra Celsum VI, 22) the first step was made of lead and corresponded to the Saturnian sky, the second step was of tin (Venus), the third of bronze (Jupiter), the fourth of iron (Mercury), the fifth of "copper /Münzlegierung/" (Mars), the sixth of silver (the Moon), the seventh of gold (the Sun). The eighth step according to Celsus, represents the sphere of fixed stars. When the initiated climbs up this ceremonial ladder, he crosses the "seven Heavens", till he reaches the Empyreum.³

In the picture "Himmelsleiter" (Heavenly Stair) - the spiral stair dominates the composition. The flatness of the picture is emphasised by the objects attached to the surface as well as by

¹ Mircea Eliade, *Die Religionen und das Heilige*, p. 146

² Franz Kafka "Hunter Gracchus", quoted after Harold Bloom, catalogue, Anselm Kiefer, Merkaba, Gagosian Gallery, p. 32

³ Mircea Eliade, *Die Religionen und das Heilige*, p. 138

the inscriptions of numbers related to the stars. The light of the stars creates the atmosphere of mystery about the “heavenly ladder.” Kiefer stresses in the picture the significance of the stair as if inviting the spectator to ascend at least visually. The stair is the central image in the picture and is executed in lighter colour as compared to the background which makes it lucid against the sombre backdrop of the star-dotted sky.

Yet in Kiefer's pictorial interpretation this endless stair is not about an ascent, but more about the impossibility of ascent or of an escape from the earthly realm. Actually the stair in the picture leads nowhere. The inscriptions of numbers related to the stars all over the picture surface supposedly render the sense of scientific precision. However the coordinates of the stars inscribed upon the canvas create a profusion of details that prevents clarity. The painting depicts the abstraction of the sky crossed by the “heavenly ladder” that impresses the viewer by its size but that no one can climb.

In ancient religions and in the archaic mystic rituals the heavenly realms were perceived as unattainable. The eternity of the heavens was opposed to the transitoriness of the earthly existence. Therefore the symbol of the ladder/stair leading to the heavens has always been of essential importance since it was the only means to arrive to the celestial realm, available only to the chosen ones. “The highest, for people unattainable regions, the realms of the stars are characterised by the divine and transcendental glory, that of absolute reality and of eternity. This region is the dwelling of the gods; some chosen ones arrive there by means of the rituals of the ascension; in some religions the souls of the dead hover there. The 'height (altitude)' is one of the categories that is unattainable for people, that rightfully belongs to the supernatural powers and beings; the one who is elevated to these heights by means of ceremonially climbing the steps of the sacral ladder or of the ritual stairs, leading to the sky, ceases to be a human being. The souls of the particularly favoured dead have through their heavenly ascension abandoned human condition.”¹ (*Pic. 51. Himmelsleiter (Heavenly Stair) 2002, oil, emulsion, acrylic, wire cages, metal shelves, glass on canvass, 380 x 280 cm*).

The term “heavenly stair” is an essential metaphor in the language of the Kabbala. Kiefer transforms in his paintings the figurative language of the Kabbala into visual tropes, his representation of the linguistic metaphors translates word into palpable form. The over-painted photographs of stairs made of concrete are indicative of the ascent of the spirit that the

¹ Ibid. p. 66

Kabbala mystics were supposed to undergo. The process is symbolised in Kiefer's works by a stair of concrete that implies wandering up and down, transition into another stage of existence.

In the pictures "Oroborus" and "Sefer Hechaloth" the circular contours painted over the photos of stairs create the impression of dynamic movement. The works oscillate between the deepness of the perspective where the photographed stairs vanish and the flatness of the picture plane containing geometric forms: circular forms – wheels - alchemical symbols of cosmic rotation, squares, diagonal lines dividing the picture plane into separate segments. These elements of geometric abstraction introduce the sense of precision. The painting "Orboros" conveys the dynamics of incessant movement. "Oroborus" a cosmic snake that bites its own tail, the primeval symbol of endless rotation¹ is represented as lead circle-like shapes attached to a painted photograph of stairs leading up and down. The rhythm of the stairs disappearing in the perspective is opposed to the flatness of the picture plane with the rounded lead contour of the snake attached onto the photograph's surface.

"The knowledge to which the snake seduces, the knowledge of the good and the evil is nameless. It is in the deepest sense void, and this knowledge itself the only evil known to the state of paradise - the knowledge of the good and of the evil is left without name, it is the knowledge from outside."² This external knowledge, symbolised by the snake - the cause of the fall of man, is at the periphery of knowledge and meaning. According to Gershom Scholem the snake lived at the borders of the paradise. It was supposed to guard its frontiers and was not allowed to crawl inside. By crawling in, it caused an imbalance. The snake as the ancient symbol of wisdom and of evil, is ambiguous. On the one hand it symbolises knowledge and is even regarded as seraphim and the fallen angel, on the other - it is the embodiment of evil. In the painting "Oroborus" Kiefer attempts by formal means: by counterpointing the circular shapes to the angular ones and by introducing the elements of deep perspective opposed to the flatness of the picture surface, to bring together the different aspects of the snake - a mythic being characterised by *coincidentia oppositorum*.

¹ Alchemie und Mystik, Alexander Roob, p. 513

² „Die Erkenntnis zu der die Schlange verführt, das Wissen was gut sei und böse, ist namenlos. Es ist im tiefsten Sinne nichtig, und dieses Wissen, eben selbst das einzige böse, das der paradisiische Zustand kennt, das Wissen um gut und böse verläßt den Namen, es ist eine Erkenntnis von Außen,“ Walter Benjamin, Medienästhetische Schriften, p. 76

In the painted photograph "Sefer Hechaloth" the pattern of circular and square lines form an austere geometric grid imposed upon the perspectival depths into which the photographed stairs disappear. The grid is made up of painted squares inscribed into a circle that conveys the sense of dynamic rotation. The circle – the alchemical wheel – is prominent in the pictorial composition of the "Sefer Hechalot" painting. It frames everything, encompasses the images. The wheel in alchemy is "the cause/source of life and of rain, it is also the source of meaning (...) and when the planetary wheel comes to a stand, it becomes the source of things."¹

Square inscribed into a circle is also a motive related to a problem proposed by ancient geometers. Squaring a circle is a geometric problem which requires to construct a square with the same area as a given circle by using only a finite number of steps with compass and straightedge. More abstractly and more precisely, it may be taken to ask whether specified axioms of Euclidean geometry concerning the existence of lines and circles entail the existence of such a square. The task was proven to be impossible, as a consequence of the fact that pi (π) is a transcendental, irrational number; that is, it is not the root of any poly-nominal with rational coefficients. The term "squaring a circle" is often used to indicate a problem that is impossible to solve.

Anselm Kiefer does not provide any clues to the solution of the problem either. He relates the ancient geometric problem to the mysterious and unresolvable nature of the universe itself, which although appears rational and calculable remains transcendental and beyond human understanding. Kiefer's painting also refers to "Hechalot Literature." "'Hechal' is Hebrew for a 'palace' in a sense indistinguishable from 'temple'. There are seven firmaments, each with its palace, and an eighth firmament above them, where divine wisdom resides. The crucial figure who ascends to the seven heavenly palaces is Enoch, 'Who walked with God and God took him,' meaning that Enoch, instead of dying, journeyed above and became the angel Metatron."²

In the paintings "The Seven Palaces", 2002, "The Heavenly Palaces", 2004, the steel traps attached to canvases are accompanied by numbers from one to seven, each cage containing a lead stone. The significance of the number seven in the Kabbala, as well as the presence of a

¹ Alchemie und Mystik, Alexander Roob, p. 520

² Harold Bloom, Anselm Kiefer, Merkaba, Gagosian Gallery, NY, 2002, p. 23

stone that among others refers to philosopher's stone (Lapis Philosophorum), the symbol of wisdom in alchemy, indicates that Kiefer introduces in these paintings themes not only from Kabbala but from other sources as well: e.g. alchemy. He counterpoints here different meanings, shifts contexts in order to visualise in his work mythological and religious imagery accumulated through centuries, thus offering the contemporary spectator the possibility to reinterpret them in our contemporary world. It is as if the artist questions the viability and relevance of the centuries-old doctrines and the virtues proposed in them today in the world after the Holocaust. The cages attached to the medial support are randomly numbered, as if to make the impression of clarity and precision. One follows a complicated network of contours, inscriptions, forms and lines that do not indicate the way through the seven firmaments. The spectators are more likely to picture themselves at a loss in a labyrinth in search for the way to the centre, which is the way to the self. (*Pic. 52. Sefer Hechaloth /The Hechaloth Book/, 2002, 112 x 88 cm, painted photograph*)

Athanor

In the painting „Athanor“, 2008, the artist represents himself as dead, his naked body is depicted against the dark cosmic background of universal emptiness. The nude represented in the lower part of the painting is connected to the heavens with a thin cord. The words 'nigred', 'albedo', 'rubedo' inscribed in hand in the right corner of the painting refer to the three colours of alchemy: black, white and red. These colours correspond to lead, silver and gold. The title of the painting „Athanor“ is the name for the alchemical oven, that could fabricate the philosopher's stone.¹

Lapis philosophorum - philosopher's stone was believed to be the highest mystery in alchemy, the symbol of wisdom, the most sought after substance. It was the symbol of ultimate perfection, heavenly bliss, rejuvenation and immortality and could turn base metals into silver and gold. The colours referred to by Kiefer in his painting are of particular significance in alchemy. The black colour – nigredo, indicates the Saturnine night, the black phase, the ash, the decay.²

¹ „Athanor“ by Marie-Laure Bernadac, p. 4

² Alchemie und Mystik, Alexander Roob, p. 175, cited after D. Stolcius v. Stolcenberg, Viridarium chymicum, Frankfurt, 1624

In alchemical teachings the universe itself used to be interpreted as athanor, for example the cosmic diagram in the form of an oven in Thomas Norton's alchemical poem "Ordinall of Alchemy."¹ Athanor is the oven where all principles fuse in the final red colour, rubedo, symbolised by the phoenix, Apollo, the centre, the spiritual gold.²

The white colour, albedo, in alchemy indicates whitening, symbolised by a dove, purification of the black matter after the nigredo phase.³ Anselm Kiefer compares alchemical oven to the process of artistic creation. The colours: black, white and red indicated by the inscriptions in the picture are not only the colours related in alchemy to certain substances and concepts, these are also some of the basic colours in painting. Athanor, the alchemic oven, is compared to painting as the means of achieving perfection, as the possibility of revelation of the ultimate truth that could only be perceived through senses. The motive of a painter represented dead also refers to the death of painting itself in the age following the Auschwitz. It is as if painting attempts to overcome its own death by analysing it in representation.

¹ Ibid. p. 143, cited after Thomas Norton, *Tractatus chymicus*, Frankfurt, 1616

² Ibid. p. 143, cited after Thomas Norton, *Tractatus chymicus*, Frankfurt, 1616

³ *Alchemie und Mystik*, Alexander Roob, p. 321, cited after S. Trismosin, *Splendor solis*, London, 16 c.

Chapter VI

Sculptures, Architecture and Installations

Palaces

Kiefer's sculptures are not restricted to human or natural forms. In most cases his sculptural installations and architecture are reduced to archetypal simplicity. The traditional materials, such as stone or bronze are abandoned in favour of concrete, lead, iron or plaster. These sculptures and architecture characterised by rectilinear forms, the emphasis on the materials that influence the form reinterpret constructivist style. The ruined structure of the towers restricted to geometrical forms, appears to bear traces of violence. The rectangular shape of the towers and installations created for the “Chute d'étoiles” (Starfall) in Grand Palais, for example, suggests reduction to materials, monochromic colour palette. Some of his concrete constructions contain non-geometrical, organic forms, like dried plants.

Kiefer's sculptures and architecture appear to ignore mass and laws of gravity dissolving heavy materials they are made of into light and air. They are transparent, translucent creating in spite of physical heaviness and rugged structure the illusion of lightness. These three-dimensional objects are not carved but mostly set together, assembled of square blocks of concrete or sheets of lead.

Kiefer's beton towers define space optically. Their formal vocabulary carries references to and simultaneously transforms the traditions of modernist architecture. Contrary to the principle of functionality essential for modern architecture Kiefer's concrete constructions are devoid of this aspect. His unstable towers are not intended for any sustainable dwelling, sheltering, accommodation or storage.

These towers soaring up to the skies engulf the spectator, conditioning one's perception of space, its arrangement and its transformation. The beton structures are permeated with light, easy to visually penetrate. The aspect of destruction in Kiefer's works emerges as a reference to the inevitable entropy, bringing into discourse the experience of time as a destructive aspect. The towers maintain certain archaic aura, making them appear as ruins of temples erected long ago. The corroded beton “palaces” are visual tropes for civilisations on the verge of disappearance, whereas the lead books stuck between the bearing walls, barely visible in

the concrete rubble, delineate them as spaces for knowledge. Installations with books arranged on shelves among the debris and glass splinters designate them as obsolete media related to language and writing counterpointed to the image-saturated contemporary era. In “Chute d'étoiles” the beton towers arranged in the nave of the Grand Palais indicate a certain order and rhythm that transforms the space. This order corresponds for the artist to the universal order related to the stars, to the rhythm of their birth and disappearance, to their influence upon the earth and their fall.

Viewing Kiefer's towers the spectator can visualise the stages of their construction, one also becomes aware of the materials they are made of, the raw blocks of concrete, lead, dried plants, sheets of glass reflecting light. These are broken forms emphasising imperfection and dissonance, suggesting the motive of the break of the vessels from the Kabbala mythology.

The "Seven Heavenly Palaces" at the Bicocca in Milan are structures made of corroded blocks of concrete piled upon one another and pierced with window openings. They appear makeshift, unstable, temporary. The "palaces" are evidently not suitable for the utilitarian, earthly use. The raw geometric outlines of the buildings emphasise austerity of form, deprived of any imperious décor traditionally characteristic for palaces. The impression is that the rugged blocks of concrete are piled upon each other carelessly without the intention of achieving symmetry and balance, which lends these constructions particular fragility. The towers are named after notions from the Cabbala e.g. “Tzim-Tzum” and “Shevirat-ha-Kelim.” Instead of glorifying the earthly power inscribed in any kind of representational architecture Kiefer subverts the idea of palaces in favour of precariously balanced constructions symbolising simultaneously destruction and heavenly ascent.

The structure of the "palaces" is reduced to elementary forms, the basic components of a building: e.g. bearing walls, openings for the windows, supporting structures. Their “heavenly” aspect is underscored through the fact that these are the spaces of remembrance, of knowledge rather than of power and influence generally characteristic of palace architecture. These “palaces” are not intended for dwelling, but for the spectators contemplation. Their impressive scale emotionally affects the spectator, inspires, at the same time causing the feeling of precarious instability, disturbance, insecurity. The "palaces" on the verge of collapse dramatise the experience of the spectator, who feels threatened by the

instability, dwarfed by their sheer size. Their temporary presence suggests the fate of the tower of Babel destroyed as a sign of punishment.

The traces of destruction characteristic for Kiefer's architecture and for paintings related to architecture can be related to the symbolic importance of the theme of destruction in mythology. In the Kabbala mythology the theme of break is essential. It was only after the divine vessels were broken, that the light as the emanation of God was emitted. Kiefer in his artworks imitates the divine process of construction and destruction.

In the Hechalot literature the Seven Heavenly Palaces marked the seven stages of spiritual ascent through the heavenly realm. The Kabbalists used to undertake this spiritual journey to achieve enlightenment and to gain insight into the divine mysteries. According to the Hechalot mythology the Seven Heavenly Palaces are an alternative to the earthly palaces - particularly to the Second Temple, which was destroyed by the Romans in the 70 C. E. In representing his heavenly palaces as half ruined, precariously tilted towers Kiefer relates both to the catastrophe of the destruction of the Second Temple as well as to the destructions that occurred in Germany in the course of the World War II. The trauma of the Temple destruction is related to the trauma of the Holocaust. The towers of concrete covered with ash appear to stand as mute witnesses of historical calamities. The physical destruction of the earthly palaces can only be remedied according to the Hechalot mythology by the spiritual purification and the ascent to the Seven Heavenly Palaces, an esoteric endeavour fraught with danger, the outcome of which is unknown since according to the teachings only the chosen ones can achieve the final destination.

Kiefer refers very often to the theme of the Heavenly Palaces which according to the Kabbala can only be achieved by the Merkaba chariot - a mysterious vehicle that is the only means to travel in the celestial realms. The towers of concrete on earth are supposed to be the remote replicas of the heavenly palaces, that are otherwise unattainable for the spectator and unknown. And if according to the Hechalot mythology they can only be reached by means of the Merkaba chariot for the few select, Kiefer's "Heavenly Palaces" are made visible and available for the spectator by means of art.

Kiefer's major challenge is to reveal the intense discrepancies between art on the one hand

and the concepts of power, propaganda and glorification of the ruling regimes traditionally symbolised by architecture, as is evident in the architecture of the “Chute d’étoiles“ (Starfall) created for Monumenta 2007 in Grand Palais, Paris. The Grand Palais, an edifice of epic proportions was designed for the Universal Exhibition, that used to be held at the intervals of eleven years throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. The Exhibition was an opportunity for different nations to present their achievements in business, industry and arts. The spectacular constructions designed for the event used to be pulled down by its end. The exceptions were the Eiffel Tower and the Grand Palais both of which remained.

The Grand Palais was designed for the Universal Exhibition to be held in 1900. The building was invested with symbolic importance as it was expected to usher the new century and to outdo in its scale and grandeur the highlights of all the previous Universal Exhibitions. It combined elements of classicism and Art Nouveau. However history has had its effect upon the fate of the building. During the World War I Grand Palais was transformed into a military hospital. During the World War II, in the hands of German occupants the Palais was requisitioned to act as a truck depot and then housed two exhibitions devoted to Nazi propaganda.¹ Grand Palais was conceived by its architects as the monument to arts and glory as the inscription on its facade reads: "This monument has been dedicated by the Republic to the glory of French Art."²

Kiefer's installation “Chute d’étoiles“ with architecture and paintings in the Nave of the Grand Palais is devoted among others to Paul Celan and Ingeborg Bachman. It is a homage to poets and to poetry, however its aim is not to glorify but to commemorate, to mourn the tragic fate of a poet, the fate of alienation and exclusion. Poetry is compared here to “starfall” as an experience causing profound emotion, bringing the heavenly realm down to earth. Events of universal scale, such as, for example, the birth and the fall of stars are related to poetry. The cultural heritage of mankind symbolised by lead books arranged in lead libraries is a microcosm that corresponds to the macrocosm of the universe. The poetry of Paul Celan and Ingeborg Bachman conveys the experience of universal anguish and trauma maintained in language that unlike stone or glass survives the destruction of time and therefore is related to stars. Poetry is commemorated in Kiefer's installation with paintings and architecture with

¹ www.grandpalais.fr/en/The-building/History

² „Ce monument a été consacré par la République à la gloire de l'art français“, www.grandpalais.fr/fr/Le-monument/Histoire/L-Exposition-universelle-de-1900/p-105-La-construction.htm

dried plants and books wedged between blocks of concrete or cast into the rubble. Beton constructions on the verge of ruin within the vast space of the Grand Palais nave is a dedication where the visual and the verbal, the symbolic, the public and the subjective aspects are brought together, creating particular tension that results in a deeply moving image, related to the universal philosophical issues of existence and disappearance, construction and destruction, the physical and metaphysical aspects.

The monumental architecture of the Grand Palais runs contrary to the aesthetic of ruin created by Kiefer in its nave. The “Chute d’étoiles” is a monument that counterpoints the grandeur of classic architecture. Instead it displays precarious structures that are built defying classic architectural principles of symmetry and unity. The structures erected by Kiefer for “Chute d’étoiles” fill the Grand Palais with a certain broken rhythm, the suspense before something doomed for failure.

Grand Palais is a representational building calculated to impress the viewer. This effect upon the viewer is opposed by Kiefer in his installation with “palaces” of his own construction. The towers erected in the nave of the Grand Palais are stylistically similar to those of “Jericho” placed in the courtyard of the London Royal Academy of Arts. Whether inside a building or outside these towers dominate the area making one wonder their scale.

The same way as in the Nave of the Grand Palais, in the Annenberg Courtyard of the London Royal Academy of Arts the shift of the contexts, the unusual settings for the towers attract attention allowing to reinterpret the surrounding architecture and Kiefer's constructions set in it. The two towers of “Jericho” establish a certain dialogue with the surrounding architecture. Their disruptive character to a certain extent strips the architecture of the Courtyard of their majestic rigour bringing the element of critique by emphasising the instability and collapse. On the other hand towers as the symbols of power within the Annenberg Courtyard formally imitate the rectilinear shapes underlying order and continuity within a certain rhythm that reinforces the impression of authority communicated by the surrounding architectural setting. “Passing through the gateway from Piccadilly into the Burlington House courtyard, the visitor is met with three hundred and fifty years of architectural history. Though undetectable in its exterior, Burlington House itself, standing to the north of the courtyard and home to the Royal Academy since 1867, is the last surviving

town palace of four that were built along Piccadilly in the 1660s. For its first 200 years it housed two aristocratic families related by marriage. Over that time it was subject to dramatic and still visible transformations as each owner sought to remake it according to their particular requirements and imperatives. In 1854 it was bought by the government and during the 1860s the site was remade for institutional use as a home of arts and sciences – a great statement of national cultural and intellectual might.”¹

Kiefer's towers in the courtyard of the Royal Academy of Arts with lead books and a ship model at the top reached up to 16,50 metres. The title “Jericho” evoked the theme from the Old Testament. According to the Book of Joshua the Israelites came to the city of Jericho from the bondage in Egypt. They destroyed the wall of Jericho by walking around it with the arc of the covenant for seven days. On the last day they blew the horns and shouted as a result of which the walls fell down. By shifting the context and putting the motive of Biblical Jericho into the surroundings of a former palace, the architecture of which is referred to as a “palimpsest”² due to a variety of styles that influenced its appearance Kiefer reinterprets the Biblical myth presenting architecture as a trope for transiency and transformation. The fate of Jericho is compared to the fate of the Burlington House: although the surrounding royal architecture might seem imperial it has been throughout the history of its existence subject to constant modifications depending on the tastes and goals of its former owners, and in future will not escape the fate of Jericho either. Conceived as a palace Burlington House further became the premises for the Royal Academy of Arts. In Kiefer’s installation it is analysed as a space of knowledge related to Britain's cultural heritage with a collection including works by some of the famous British artists e.g. Reynolds, Gainsborough, Turner, Constable, Sargent and Hockney.

The book and the navigation vehicle, the boat, crowning Kiefer’s towers in the Annenberg Courtyard refer to the aspects intrinsic for a site of knowledge, like Academy. The artist brings the symbols of Academy's inner aspects e.g. libraries, collections into the outer realm. The traditional elements of architectural décor: sculptural or ornamental forms that adorn the facades of the Burlington House reappear in Kiefer’s installation in a modified way, the artist reinterprets their meaning representing them as objects related to science placed on top of tilted concrete towers otherwise emptied of their contents. “The Royal Academy had been

¹ Peter Schmitt, Owen Hopkins, Burlington House a Brief History, Tradewinds Ltd., p. 1

² Ibid.

founded in 1768 by George III to promote the 'arts of design' by providing professional training for artists and through annual exhibitions of works by living artists... The Academy's Library is the oldest fine arts library in Britain and has served the needs of students, Academicians and scholars for over 200 years."¹ Kiefer's towers topped with a lead book and a model boat refer to this history. Yet "the beton constructions are like card houses set one over the other, with lead pieces thrust in between supposedly to keep the whole piece in balance. Still the towers appear as if they are about to collapse any moment. As Kiefer himself put it, the London installation is about transformation, time, instability, decay, remembrance and resurrection. The artist thus emphasises the instability of architecture in time and draws parallel to the Jericho towers that were found by archaeologists after World War II."²

The precariously balanced towers are also a monument, dedicated to the human effort to construct and to create in spite of the knowledge of the final destruction. Although these towers or palaces as Kiefer sometimes refers to them seem to be erected against all rules of stability one hopes against hope that they survive. The architectonic structures rising high above the earth look unfinished. One is never supposed to differentiate the beginning from the end, the ascent from descent. This indefiniteness, loss of direction makes the viewer particularly uneasy. (*Pic. 53. Jericho, towers installed in Royal Academy courtyard, London, 2007*)

Analysing Kiefer's architectural installations Michael Auping mentioned the influence of Le Corbusier's monastery La Tourette due to extensive use of the concrete. "The sleek horizontal containment of Le Corbusier's monastery, however, has been transformed into deliberately crude architectural elegies to a once-secret explanation of the path to God and heaven – perverse extensions of the Merkaba tradition, with its divine chariot that carries mind and spirit through seven heavenly palaces described by Kabbalistic mystics."³

Both in three-dimensional installations and in works analysing architecture in painted images Kiefer brings into discourse the socio-political dimensions of architecture, related to the history of particular buildings or of architects, the symbolic cultic importance of temples or palaces in antiquity e.g. mastabas, the walls of Jericho, the "heavenly palaces," antique

¹ Ibid. p.p. 14-24

² Gina Thomas, F.A.Z. Hier können sie nicht stehen bleiben, Februar 6, 2007, p. 37

³ Michael Auping, Anselm Kiefer, Heaven and Earth, p. 44

libraries. By referring in his works to architecture related to ancient civilisations, or by representing his constructions as damaged or antiquated the artist delineates the relationship of architectural form to its purposes. One can trace the transformation of architectural forms in time, their obsolescence, modifications in style. Yet the recurrence of concrete towers as a repetitive motive in Kiefer's works analyses one of the basic aspects of architecture in cultural history that remains unchangeable in all epochs from antiquity till today, in spite of formal, stylistic changes: architecture is rendered by Kiefer as the symbol of power. The phallic towers are manifestations of authority, hierarchy and control irrevocably related to architecture in all times. The way of rendering towers on the verge of collapse adds a subversive edge to their representation: unstable edifices on the verge of collapse articulate the moment of inevitable breakdown.

In the paintings related to the architecture abused by the Nazi regime in Germany the historical, subjective and ideological references converge presenting these buildings as spaces of almost unresolvable contradictions related to violence, trauma, repression. These are architectural forms rendered in painting and thus re-evaluated within the contemporary context. In Kiefer's painting "Athanor" the architecture of a building formerly used by the Nazis is reduced to its austere geometrical core revealing the bearing colonnade and the walls. In such a radically reduced state the architecture in this painting is very close to the style of the "Heavenly Palaces." The destruction is supposed to transform the building. In "Athanor" the artist creates the painterly illusion of revealing the building's inner core which is in itself neutral to political or historical connotations. By extreme reduction to the primary components, by destruction and turning into ruin Kiefer attempts to eliminate the components of ideological influence evident in architecture. The painter reveals in the picture the primary components making up the building e.g. the separate blocks of concrete, bearing walls, frames, columns. One might see that the same components might be used for the construction of the "heavenly palaces" and an ideologically tainted building that used to serve the Nazi regime. By representing buildings in the state of ruin Kiefer enables the spectator to focus on the formal and stylistic characteristics of the architecture reduced to its primary components, rather than on its historical, socio-political and ideological aspects. He thus liberates architecture from the profane functionality tasks: accommodating certain offices, being representational, serving ideological goals of power and authority. Although in architecture formal aspects are closely related to functional tasks Kiefer in his paintings related to

architecture separates the two in an attempt to show the inner potential of architectural form to produce new meaning.

In his book Matthew Biro argues that the works of Kiefer are characterised by "intentional ambiguity and hermeneutic undecidability, supporting simultaneously both left-wing and fascist readings", which, as he writes, explains why "the German critical establishment was initially very critical of Kiefer's work in 1980."¹ Analysing the artist's neoclassical architecture paintings, Biro maintains, that these are examples of the author's "undecidability" towards the NS regime. Kiefer's paintings related to architecture are overlaid with natural and material elements: oil, acrylic, straw, shellac, woodcut. They are based on photographs from the Nazi art magazines. Mere comparison of Kiefer's painting "Interior" (1981), for example, to the photo of Albert Speer's Mosaic Room of the new Reich Chancellery in Berlin, on which the painting is based, makes evident the painter's attitude towards it. Biro maintains that Kiefer purposefully antiquates this space to give it the look which Speer intended for the eventual ruins of the Nazi buildings.² It is, however, questionable that Kiefer represented the destroyed and burnt interior of the Nazi Chancellery to present it as a heroic ruin. Instead he presents here an enclosed space with darkness looming beneath the empty windows. The dark rectangular openings in the mournful interior allow the spectator to catch a glimpse beneath the walls, into the hidden and mysterious dark space beyond.

Kiefer's painting "Interior" is not the majestic ruin honouring the past, but the picture of a building that by means of an extreme reduction to its elementary components: bare walls, cavities of windows, ceiling and destroyed floors, thematises the nature, the formal aspects of architecture, stylistic elements, symmetry, proportion, perspective, the organisation of space. The painter attempts to demonstrate the relationship between the viewer and the viewed, how this relationship changes in the course of history and what is the nature of this change. According to Kiefer it is not the building itself that is evil, but the attitude of the spectator, therefore buildings, even those that functioned for the most monstrous regimes can be transformed, if the spectators themselves are prepared to innerly transform.

In Kiefer's painting "Interior" any signs of authority or glorification of the regime that are present in the respective photo of the Chancellery in its original state are eliminated. Photo of

¹ Matthew Biro, Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger, p.92

² Ibid. p. 104

Albert Speer's Courtyard of the New Reich Chancellery, Berlin glorify the neo-classical architecture, emphasising its imperial character through sharp contrasts of light and shadow, imposing size, strict proportions, the severe rhythm of regular horizontal and vertical lines, that breaks the planes of the space creating the impression of authority, discipline and permanence. Whereas Kiefer's "Athamor" painting, 1983-84, based on the above-mentioned photo represents the same space as a topos of ruin, a devastated and abandoned space, bearing scars of fire. In "Athamor" the artist emphasises the neo-classical architecture as the architecture reduced to basic primary elements, scarred by history. This is the architecture painting that unambiguously reveals the irrevocable decay and disappearance of the regime it was meant to serve. Therefore the name of the painting is "Athamor", the alchemical term that means the oven for transformation of substances from lower to the upper realm. Kiefer's paintings of neo-classical architecture are deprived of the pathetic glorification articulate in the respective Nazi photos of the same buildings. This is evident from the dark sombre colour palette in Kiefer's pictures, the absence of severe sharp contrasts, the artist's method of attachment of straw and depicting traces of fire that imply the vulnerability of the architecture to its imminent destruction. The painter purposefully choses the buildings charged with the history of fascism to break the taboo of silence about them. The representation of these spaces sets itself the aim to provoke the spectator, to make one face the historical facts, to come to terms with the past, questioning the role of architecture in it, to bring the theme of the fascist past into discourse. These are spaces imbued with the trauma, the painful knowledge turned by the artist into spaces for remembrance. (*Pic. 54. Innenraum (Interior), 1981, 287 x 311 cm, oil, acrylic, shellac, emulsion on canvas, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam*)

In the painting "To the Supreme Being" the impressive hall of a building that revives with the spectator the repressed imagery of architectural style appropriated by the Nazi regime, historical contexts and meanings are shifted to add particular tension to the represented architecture. The title of the picture refers to the cult of the Supreme Being introduced by Maximilian Robespierre. By referring to the French Revolution and to one of its leaders Kiefer underscores the double nature of the revolution. The French Revolution and the cult of the Supreme Being introduced by Robespierre glorified reason and the progressive humanistic ideals of equality, freedom, fraternity. At the same time the Supreme Being is irrelevantly connected to the reign of terror that occurred after the onset of the French Revolution, incited by conflict among the rival political factions, a period of violence marked by mass executions

of the “enemies of revolution.” By entitling the picture depicting a neo-classical interior, associated with the Nazi regime, after the symbol of the French Revolution Kiefer questions the role of architectural iconography related to socio-political and historical events. The pictorial format allows to figure out the process of architectural form producing meaning. Representation of the interior with the emphasis on the stylistic elements of neo-classicism brings into discourse the formal characteristics of the style. Although associated for the spectator with the Nazi ideology neo-classicism's origins are not related to Nazism. The style was only appropriated by the regime since it was considered best suited to represent the ideology for the masses.

Pictorial format allows to better emphasise architectural principles of organisation of space through central perspective, relation of forms, proportion, symmetry - the parameters that are essential not only for neo-classicism but for architecture in general, as well as for neo-classical architecture in other countries. Such representation sets a broader context for analysing the style. The austerity of form deprived of excessive ornamentation, strict geometric order introduced by the neo-classic architecture manifests the superiority of reason in organisation of space. Reason was the primary virtue and the essential religious tenet of the French Revolution that introduced the cult of the Supreme Being. Yet architecture organised along the centuries-old principles of its own appears in Kiefer's pictorial representation to remain indifferent to socio-political or historical ramifications. Architecture is subject to formal virtues of its own, that can be appropriated by ideologies, but that remain impartial to them. Kiefer emphasises in this picture the relations between architectural elements, the structural aspects of the interior, the vertical and horizontal lines running parallel, the grid that rationalises the space. It is not only the cult introduced by the French Revolution that Kiefer refers to as the Supreme Being but architecture in general with its basic principles that remain unchangeable, supreme, superior to the reasonings of propaganda, ideology, political regime that are subject to change. The formal vocabulary intrinsic to the architecture is rendered as the most important, supreme factor that is superior to all other aspects related to it.

The interior dedicated to the Supreme Being draws upon the ambivalence of the history of the French Revolution accompanied by violence counterpointed by the violent history of Nazism. The picture suggests a more complex comprehension of history, attempting to delimit the role of architecture within it. The role often misinterpreted, exaggerated or downsized.

Architecture, that is always self-referential and superior to ideology, cannot be held responsible for the crimes committed by a regime. The tabooed history of Nazism in Germany is interpreted by the artist within the discourse of the controversial legacy of the past, that has influenced our perception of art related to it.

There is, of course, a profound portion of ambiguity in Kiefer's representations of architecture, but this ambiguity relates to the medium itself of architecture or of painting. Representation imitates and creates an image, that is highly subjective, images "instead of presenting ... re-present the world"¹ This ambiguity is deeply rooted in Kiefer's whole approach to art that can be appropriated by political ideologies or abused by violent regimes.

Kiefer's architecture paintings of vast halls, interiors, crypts are empty, people or nature do not belong here. Life seems to be sacrificed to the rational geometric order emphasising "geomtrismus as the martyrdom of the body, the violence of higher order against ordinary, simple forms of life."² Representations of deserted buildings bearing traces of fire are projected onto heavily worked flat surfaces of canvases to which thick layers of shellac, acrylic, oil and straw are applied. The way Kiefer handles the National-Socialist content does not leave much place for "undecidability." The artist is critical not of the architecture but of the regime that misappropriated it. Therefore the signs of the regime are blackened out, eliminated from the picture plane. He demonstrates the fate of buildings in the course of history, revealing that it is not architecture made of blocks of concrete, glass, bricks, etc. that is evil, but those who use them as ideological tools. "Kiefer's method is converse. He tackles this content by means of form. The top and side lights of his axial compositions fall into cultic spaces with no cult, in which the imagination sees itself in the doomed consequence of realisation."³

The neo-classic style in architecture was adopted by the Third Reich and suited for its ideological purposes. Neo-classicism was one of the leading architectural styles in Europe in the thirties. „Albert Speer preferred to consider his work in a European setting. Around 1900 European architects were searching for a new medium to express their awareness of a

¹

Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, pp. 7-14

² Boris Groys, *Kunst-Kommentare*, p. 158

³ Jürgen Harten, Renata Sharp, Anselm Kiefer, *Catalogue for the exhibition at the State Art Gallery, Dusseldorf*, p.129

changing society and their disgust with the overlaid historicism of the late nineteenth century. Jugendstil and neo-classicism were part of this mood. By the nineteen-thirties neo-classicism was expressed through several important works in France, Italy and Russia. The style was characterised by simplified colonnades, heavy cornices and porticoes ... They (the neo-classic buildings) were intended to “spell out in architecture the political, military and economic power of Germany.”¹ (*Pic. 55. To the Supreme Being, 1983, 278 x 368 oil, acrylic, emulsion, shellac, straw and fragments of woodcuts on canvas, Musée national d'art moderne, Paris*)

Returning to Kiefer's architectural installations, in “Chute d'étoiles“ in Grand Palais the beton towers are deprived of any political-ideological function. These “houses” are all too human, imperfect, unfinished. One can walk into them, examine their "interiors" their relationship to surrounding space, their inner realm. Contrary to the Nazi idea of architecture for “the empire of thousand years,” Kiefer's towers are temporary, they hardly seem to survive time. These are constructions that thematise the thin line between art and non-art, between pure aesthetics of form opposed to functionality, between the inner core and the outer façade. In his installation for the "Monumenta" in Grand Palais Kiefer attempted to reveal the discrepancies between the architecture of the Palais, that at the time of its inauguration in 1900 was the symbol of architectural grandeur, counterpointed with the imperfections and the dilapidated state of his beton towers installed in the nave of the Palais.

With his towers scattered in the nave under its glass ceiling Kiefer created a monument that did not correspond or in any way emphasise the grandeur of the Palais but ran contrary to its principles of proportion, perspective, scale, its representative character. If the architects of the Grand Palais could claim skill and success in the accomplishment of their project, Kiefer emphasises his failure and inability to create anything that would ever compete with the Palais in its impressive stability and spectacular scale. The tilted towers do not aim to welcome the spectator or to manipulate vision, they are completely dysfunctional, temporary and pose constant danger of falling apart. They make up a scattered body of a dysfunctional anti-monument that Kiefer integrated into the interior of the Grand Palais.

The structure of these wrecked constructions reminds of Celan's broken language that offers the taste of the “black milk,” the alien poisonous fluid that fills from the inside. Kiefer's

¹ Robert Taylor, „A Word in Stone,“ pp.71-74, quoted after Speer, „Erinnerungen,“ p. 126

architecture for the Monumenta fills the nave of the Grand Palais remaining alien and estranged to the building's style, like the poisonous milk. The towers as alien structures within the palace interior remind the motive of the "black milk" - the leading metaphor of Celan's "Fugue of Death"- the life breeding liquid turned into deadly poison. His towers are not about sustainable construction, but about creation of structures, temporary architectonic forms reinterpreting centuries old architectural principles of stability, balance, functionality, interior and facade within the framework of the post-war, post-Holocaust cultural discourse. According to Michael Auping "books and architecture for Kiefer operate in parallel worlds; both are powerful containers that record history of human aspirations. Like books, buildings are images of authority which the artist reforms, literally eroding their iconic presence and placing them in a larger framework of time. Imposing buildings that suggest transcendence over the earth must ironically always return to it. The ruin represents the vanity of human aspirations for power and glory. While monuments attempt to fix meaning against the flow of time, Kiefer makes the overwhelming vastness of time his subject."¹

The physical presence of concrete towers enables one to enter them, walk around, examine from various angles. Yet their height prevents ordinary visitors to experience the view from above, which is the privilege of the few, including the artist. The view from above comes across very often in Kiefer's works, mainly in photographs from the books included in the library "The High Priestess", sometimes in paintings e.g. "Lilith" or the book "Jesaja". Such a view is regarded as the view of the romantic perspective. For example Altdorfer's painting "Alexanderschlacht" (The Battle of Alexander) from early 16th century that interested Kiefer - represents the view from above revealing the details of the earth's surface, such mode of vision has its tradition coming from Romanticism. It is characteristic not only for Caspar David Friedrich's "Wanderer über den Volkenmeer" (Traveller over the Sea), but also for various literary descriptions. Friedrich Schlegel, for example, in his essay about the "Principles of Gothic Architecture" (Grundzüge gotischen Baukunst), (1804-05) wrote: "One single glance from above, one breath in the free mountains transfers us into another, lighter world, being a refreshing comfort, where we forget the monotony of the plane and breathe in the new life force at the sight of the magnificence of the earth in front of us."² Seen from above buildings are liberated from the tasks of functionality: housing, conveying the sense of

¹ Michael Auping, Anselm Kiefer, Heaven and Earth, p. 40

² Kritische Schriften, Hg. Wolf Dietrich Rasch, München 1956, p. 387, in Armin Zweite, "Anselm Kiefer. Zweistromland," p. 86

power and ideology. Architecture photographed or viewed from above appears as an image transforming the surface of the earth. Kiefer stresses the temporary character of these transformations. In his photographs and paintings based on photographs of views from above he inspects the surface of the earth. Kiefer stresses in these works, that whatever appears great, impressive and high from below, is insignificant from above. Certain buildings are purposefully built to seem impressive from above like the megalomaniac NS architectural plans for Berlin, but as Kiefer presents them in his works, few of such constructions seem to survive history.

The painting "Sulamith" 1983, is based on the photo of the ceremonial hall intended to commemorate the fallen fascist soldiers. The painting's colossal size and central perspective dominate the spectator. One stands in front of the representation of a cavernous empty space with darkened windows. The handwritten barely visible inscription "Sulamith" and the presence of the Jewish religious candelabrum, Menora, looming in the perspectival depth, at the far end of the hall transforms the place from a memorial space to commemorate Nazi soldiers into a space commemorating Sulamith from Paul Celan's "Fugue of Death": "...Death is a master from Germany / your golden hair Margarete / your ashen hair Shulamite." The passage that opens up before the spectator standing in front of the painting leads one deep into the dark, sombre inner space of the vault. One gets the impression of stepping through the painted surface further deep into the mysterious, sacral darkness beyond.

Kiefer creates a visual effect of a deep passage made possible by the central perspective that appears to reveal to the viewer the hidden realms beneath the canvas surface, the realms beyond life and death. Sulamith, the Biblical name that symbolises the Jews exterminated in the Shoah, a synecdoche incorporated into the painting, is only present as the trace of writing, white against the dark background in the upper left corner of the painting. Writing, as handwriting, as the artist's bodily trace upon the canvas, writing related to language including that of the "Song of Songs", survives death thus commemorating the missing Sulamith. Neither representation, nor writing are able to genuinely render the tragedy of the Holocaust, which is beyond speech or representation. The artist represents here the basic core of the interior that used to serve the purposes of the Nazi regime. Figurative representation is opposed to the abstraction of writing: the handwritten name "Sulamith" that is an extremely conceptualised, abstract form of reference. Representation counterpointed with writing that

stands out, but is simultaneously subtly incorporated, inscribed into the interior, till the point of disappearing in it, becomes the irreplaceable component of the interior, producing the new meaning by shifting the contexts and transforming the original meaning of the architecture. The hardly visible inscription “Sulamith” conveys the borderline experience between being and non-being, writing and non-writing.

The artist's choice to commemorate Sulamith in his painting by a mere inscription of her name on the canvas surface instead of making a portrait articulates extreme conceptualisation, with text being the meta-code of an image.¹ The possibility of existence, of being preserved in language, as an inscription “Sulamith” on the canvas surface, gives the opportunity of eternal presence, through naming, the presence by “being spoken-in-language-of-the-unspeakable.”² The flatness of the picture plane underscored by the inscription and by the heavily worked canvas surface is counterpointed with the perspectival depth of the former Nazi facility, creating tension, that is comparable to the experience of the tension between existence and in-existence, remembrance and forgetting. The elements of theatricality characteristic for the Nazi regime are evident in Kiefer's representation of the space, that is painted so as to impose upon the viewer awe and to arbitrarily guide the view. (*Pic. 56. Sulamith, 1983, 290 x 370 cm, emulsion, oil, acrylic, aquatex, shellac, straw, woodcut on canvas, inscription up left: "Sulamith," private collection*)

Teatrum Naturae et Artis

Kiefer's architecture is related to painting. The same motives as well as similar formal means reappear in his paintings and in his architectural installations. The theme of ruin and collapse, reduction to primary components and the emphasis on the traces of the creation process are essential. The concrete structures such as the "Sun Ship" /Sonnenschiff/, 2007, the towers of the “Heavenly Palaces” and of the "Chute d'étoiles" analyse the role of geometric shapes in organisation of space and in our perception of it, the related issues of order, perspective, balance, lighting in architecture, revealing the core elements of the buildings, the process of construction itself. Kiefer's architecture reinterprets the formal architectural vocabulary of modernism and bares semblances to archaic temples. Kiefer's architecture draws upon and

¹ Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, pp. 7-14

² „...das In-der-Sprache-Sein-des-Nichtsprachlichen,“ Giorgio Agamben, *Die kommende Gemeinschaft*, p. 99

reinterprets the basic architectural principles elaborated from antiquity till today, as for example Vitruvius' treatise "De Architectura" according to which the basic architectural principles were firmitas, utilitas, venustas (durability, utility, beauty). These are compared to the basic criteria of modernist architecture: simplification of form, functionality, the correlation between the form and the function, the emphasis on the materials the architecture is made of. Additionally Kiefer's architecture is made to bare semblance to archaic sacred places with their references to mastabas, pyramids, ritual burials, "heavenly palaces" ruined by time. These components involve his architectural installations as well as paintings related to architecture into the discourse on the formal transformation of architectural form within different socio-political, historical or ideological circumstances with the special accent on the materials as well as the core principles of construction. It is not the evolution of architectural form through time that Kiefer analyses, but the modification of architectural form reflecting the changes in the mankind's understanding of organisation of space, order, as well as the issues of influence and manipulation through architecture.

In paintings "Eridanus", 2002, "Horlogium," 2002, "The Heavenly Palaces", 2004 geometric shapes correspond to the lines and shapes painted in the upper part of the canvas rendered in oil, emulsion, shellac, acrylic and lead on canvas or on photo paper. The sky represented as an unreadable map, crossed with lines and dotted with stars is meant to correspond to the earthly maps. The lines connecting stars above represent the universe as a certain plan for some hardly decodable divine construction that corresponds to the constructions of humans below. Both are numbered to create the illusion of scientific precision and precarious balance. The dried plants on canvas bring in the motive of nature with its annual cycles of regeneration, vegetation and withering.

Both the sky and the earth appear here as a universal theatre, *Teatrum Naturae et Artis*, related to phenomena described in ancient myths of creation, vegetation, disappearance. Their existence in language, one of the most ancient forms of preserving knowledge, is evident in the paintings in the form of handwritten texts, abstract numbers or words. This universal theatre evokes the emotion of awe, due to the colossal size of the paintings and installations. Kiefer's architectonic towers, made of concrete and lead, the paintings related to architectural motives with ruins and plants, organic and inorganic materials attached to the canvas, in spite of their majestic proportions appear as settings for the universal theatre of cosmic scale, within which the "theatre of history" is rendered as a less significant, temporary component

present as the motive of ruin, the remnants of civilisations. The motive of lead attached to canvas often functions as an opaque curtain that hinders the view, screens off whatever is beneath, as in "The Seven Heavenly Palaces" or in the "Emanation of the Sefiroth."

The concept of theatre is evident in Kiefer's works for the opera-houses in the Naples baroque Opera-House San Carlo in 2003 or at the Opera Bastille in Paris in 2009. The settings of "Electra" created by Kiefer for the Opera-House San Carlo included a square inner court with wide enclosed storeys, corridors and terraces characteristic for the oriental buildings with flat smeared white channelled walls, a shabby concrete imitation of former marble splendour. Black as if burnt out doorways that made a symmetric ornament, the parts of the construction that outlined the torn down, broken off architecture appeared as if a bomb had exploded clearing the way into the inner part of the building.¹ "In the Beginning" (Am Anfang) staged at the Opera Bastille to the music of Jörg Widmann the elements of mourning, destruction, ash reappear. Kiefer does not glorify the splendid ruins and their disappearance but demonstrates the signs of time upon the creations of men. The process of obsolescence and destruction reveals the inner core of the constructions. In his settings Kiefer offers the spectator an insight into the inner realm of the buildings tearing off the façade, showing the bearing walls, dark holes of the windows, inner passages or bridges leading into the depth – revealing the aspects that are otherwise hidden from the spectator. The view from above introducing the romantic perspective and the view inside creates the impression of revelation of the unknown heavenly realms. The staged process of disappearance and destruction is paralleled by elements of linguistic fragmentation, reduction to primary elements paralleled in poetry by Paul Celan's language with its broken syntax, reduction of speech to single words, sounds, syllables.

The precariously balanced sculpture, the "Sun Ship" for example or the towers of the "Heavenly Palaces" represent a monochromatic gradation of rough shapes piled one upon the other, with the emphasis on the repetition of the same form, reminding the motives from Kiefer's earlier work, for example the brickwork of the mastabas and pyramids, the succession of stairs, visually creating the illusion of ascent. The pronounced instability, imbalance and destruction of the sculptures stresses the temporary character of the architecture made by men, their fragility, the inevitable disappearance. The major function of these concrete structures is to articulate their utterly dysfunctional character. The use of materials like

¹ Dietmar Polaczek "Electra" in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 5.12.03, p. 31

brickwork, blocks of concrete, glass splinters, corroded lead sheets, dried plants articulate the process of entropy, gradual destruction. The progress of time is presented as the regress of the all round regress, destruction, turning into ash and ruin. The title “Sonnenschiff” however analyses among others the cult of the sun that has been venerated in archaic times and in antiquity. In many religions the sun was related to the highest being, it was identified with the gods and the heroes, that are not subject to death, since each night the sun goes down into the realm of the dead and reappears on the next day.¹ From ancient times the sovereigns and the ruling elite, the minority of the select has been identified with the sun. For example in Egypt the Pharaohs and later the Roman emperors were identified with the sun. The sun was considered as the symbol of rationalisation ... and as the *cosmic principle*.² The architecture of the “Sunship” with dried sunflowers stuck in between the blocks of concrete subtly refers to these mythological aspects of the sun. Architecture is rendered here as the symbol of power, the rationalisation principle, evident in the arrangement of the geometric forms making up the construction is counterpointed with the subversive aspect of its instability and corrosion. The sun-light itself permeating the architecture through its numerous rectilinear openings brings in the life-giving element of invigorating optimism: for Platon it (the sun) is the image of the good, the way it manifests itself in visible form (State 508, b, c).³

(Pic. 57. *Sonnenschiff/Sunship*, 2007, Barjac)

"Verstummen der Natur"⁴

In Kiefer's installation "Palm Sunday" (Palmsonntag) the major image is that of a palm branch attached to the medial surface forming a relief. The title refers to the Christian religious holiday that falls on the Sunday before Easter. It commemorates Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. According to Gospels Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem and was welcomed by the celebrating people who lay down their cloaks in front of him and waved palm branches as a sign of honour. In Jewish tradition the palm branch was a symbol of triumph and victory. Therefore the scene of a crowd greeting Jesus by waving palms and carpeting his path with palm branches is of symbolic importance.

In Kiefer's installation the frozen, stiffened forms of the palm branches attached to the medial

¹ Mircea Eliade, *Die Religionen und das Heilige*, p. 162

² Ibid. p. 179

³ Ibid. p. 180

⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Medienästhetische Schriften*, p. 80

support invoke the Biblical theme as well as the aspect of nature in art. The repetitive motive of the palm relief in the installation "Palm Sunday" for example in the White Cube Gallery exhibited in 2006 is restricted within the rectangular black frames that counterpoint the rounded organic curves of the natural forms. A giant palm tree lying lifeless on the floor symbolises a tree that has been uprooted, violently taken from its natural environment and placed somewhere else.

The palm refers here to the archaic symbol of a tree in general that played an important role in the mythology and in the religious consciousness not only of the Germans but other ancient peoples from primordial times. The palm tree with its roots and its branches displayed in the installation "Palmsontag" refers therefore not only to the Christian holiday but to the rich and complex symbolism of the tree as a sign for the regenerative nature of vegetation that has been assimilated within Christianity. The palm tree implies here the cosmic aspect symbolised by a plant. In the installation Kiefer subtly correlates the various religious and mythological meanings of the tree symbol: e.g. the tree of knowledge, the tree of sefirtoth (the divine emanations) as well as the tree of life and death. In the Germanic mythology the tree Yggdrasil was perceived "as *the* cosmic tree. Its roots reached down to the heart of the earth, to the kingdom of the giants and down to the Underworld (Völuspa, 19; Grimnismal 31).¹ It is noteworthy to mention here that "cosmos used to be identified with the 'tree turned upside down'...This mythic and metaphysic ideogram is not single. Masûdi (Morug-el-Dscheb 64, 6) mentioned a Sabian lore, according to which Platon claimed that a human is a plant turned upside down, with its roots reaching to the sky and the branches reaching towards the earth (cited after U. Holmberg, *Der Baum des Lebens*, Helsinki, 1923, p. 54). One comes across this lore in the Hebraic esoteric doctrine: "The Tree of Life extends itself downwards from above and the sun shines upon it," (Zohar, Beha' Alothea), cited after A.K. Coomaraswamy, "The Inverted Tree", in *The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society*, 29, 2, Bangalore, 1938, p. 21."²

In "Palmsontag" is interesting in the way it analyses the Christian idea of resurrection, assimilated in it from pagan beliefs and mythologies about the eternally repetitive cycles of resurrection of nature. Jesus with his fate of death followed by resurrection is compared to a tree "filled with sacred powers ... because it grows, because it loses its leaves and later regains

¹ Mircea Eliade, *Die Religionen und das Heilige*, p. 319

² Ibid. p. 317

them, because it endlessly regenerates (it 'dies' and 'resurrects')..."¹ At the same time there is the irrevocable process of physical decay implied in the installation, since the huge uprooted tree in the gallery space as well as the stiff palm branches are torn out of their natural ambience. The dried rests of the former vegetation are turned into artefacts on show for a limited period of time.

In his works Kiefer thematises the gap between the ideals instilled by Christianity, those of "Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe" (faith, hope, love) as the title of a whole series of his works goes, and the history of dissemination of Christian religion. The palm branches in "Palmsonntag" do not only stand for the glorification of Christianity but also bring to mind the violence that was carried out under the pretext of Christian propaganda. The history of Christianity is also the history of violence. Books and other monuments of antiquity were claimed as pagan and therefore ruthlessly destroyed in the name of the new religion during early Christianity. Cities were violently looted and destroyed during the medieval crusades. Thousands were killed as a result of religious intolerance and persecution instigated by Christian inquisition. In his painting "Pope Alexander VI: The Golden Bull", 1996, Kiefer refers to the violence that was carried out under the pretext of dissemination of Christianity in the middle ages. The Pope's ambitions for the church and wealth were hardly veiled by the desire to spread Christianity in the New World. Christian religion was spread there by the force of the Pope's "golden bull", accompanied by murder and cruelty. "Alexander VI was the Pope at the time of Christopher Columbus's discovery of the New World and the driving force in the search for gold there. The term 'golden bull' refers to a Papal decree with a golden seal. In Kiefer's painting gold and blood mark a trail between heaven and earth."²(*Pic. 58. Palmsonntag /Palm Sunday/, palm branches, plaster, clay, charcoal, emulsion, installation at White Cube Gallery, London, 2007*).

The dried out palm branches attached to canvases repeat the flowing, harmonious forms of nature, but at the same time they are stiff, lifeless as if mishandled by human hand. The palm branches on canvas are loaded with historical and religious meanings that imply among others ambition, power, violence related to the process of dissemination of Christianity. The branches attached to a heavily worked picture surface seem here out of the context, devoid of original natural aura. The palm tree installed in the gallery space also appears mute,

¹ Ibid. pp. 309-310

² Michael Auping, Anselm Kiefer, Heaven and Earth, p. 110

overshadowed by its historical and mythological/religious connotations.

According to Robert Fludd, a medieval scientist and alchemist, each plant has a corresponding star in the heavens. The lead book made by Kiefer in 2003 entitled "For Robert Fludd" actually represents flowers painted over its lead pages: the red poppies implying oblivion at first glance contradict the basic purpose of book, the medium of preserving knowledge and memory. The poppies are later replaced by white dots of stars accompanied by respective inscriptions indicating their coordinates in space and other related scientific data. The rough surface of the lead pages invites the viewer to closely inspect the fabric of the canvas surface, to study the images of plants painted over, one has to read the inscribed data, to decipher the numerical codes.

Anselm Kiefer analyses in his works the symbols of vegetation: flowers, plants, herbs, tree branches and roots that from archaic times have been related to the aspect of universal renewal, fertility, regeneration. Plants, for example sunflowers in Kiefer's paintings, have always represented the sacred cosmic forces that symbolise fertility, reflect the ultimate reality, the totality of the bio-cosmic life with its periodic repetitive processes of recreation.¹ In the book "The Secret Life of Plants" (1998) the constellations of black sunflowers and sunflower seeds against the white backdrop appear like writing: words written across the white pages of a book. The secret message of these inscriptions leaves one wondering, yet fascinated. Here again the relationships between the two realms: that of humans and that of vegetation is underscored in painting. Plants, sunflowers, stand for the origin, the source of life concentrated in vegetation, particularly in seeds and in sprouts. The motive of sunflowers against the background of the sky brings to mind the archaic myths about the cyclical character of life, where the human and the vegetation aspects were interrelated. According to these myths those who died with violent death used to be reborn as plants: as for example, rose bushes used to grow in the battle fields where heroes died (Mircea Eliade, *Ierburile de Sub Cruce*, *Revista Fundatilor Regale*, Nov. 1939, p. 16), or violets that sprouted from the blood of Attis, roses and anemones came from the blood of Adonis, while these two young gods fought with death; from the body of Osiris grew corn and the plant *maat* as well as all sorts of grass.² The cycle of life in which the human existence finds its continuation in the life

¹ Mircea Eliade, *Die Religionen und das Heilige*, pp.377-378

² Ibid.

of plants - the manifestation of the endless source of life¹ might remain an unresolved mystery inscribed in the open book of nature, the mystery, “the secret of plants” and of their bonds to the universe that appears timeless.

In the lead book "The Secret Life of Plants", 2001, the monumentality of the book itself: 309 cm diameter; 200.7 x 147.3 cm of each page, dwarfs the spectator with its size. The pages of the lead book are dotted with stars. Contours of heavenly plants make up the complex structure of the cosmic space. The motive of the sky dotted with stars is in fact a very recurrent theme in Kiefer's work and is of essential importance here. Like in most of his works the sky, the firmament dotted with stars is vested with religious symbolic meaning of sacredness, timelessness, unchangeability. In the religious thought of archaic peoples and in ancient mythologies the sky was interpreted as the realm of the God, it was believed to be sacral, “the sky immediately reveals its *transcendence*, its *power* and its *holiness*. ... The sky reveals (to the viewer) its intrinsic reality: its endlessness and transcendence. Precisely the firmament is something “completely different” from the tiny humans and their environment. The symbolism of its (sky's) transcendence arises ... merely from the sense of its endless height. Something “very high” is naturally the attribute of the divine.²

In his monumental books Anselm Kiefer conveys the sense of awe that one experiences when watching the firmament. The artist imitates the scale and the height of the skies to emphasise the difference between the earthly and the heavenly realms.

With all this in mind, the sky is interpreted by the artist as something intended to be read, as an open book having reference to the book of books, the Bible. Whether this open book of the universe is readable and its knowledge understandable for men on earth remains questionable. The aspect of language, implied in Kiefer's paintings in writing and in the expected process of reading is essential, because only whatever exists in language has the real existence. It is exactly the impossibility to actually read that contributes to the feeling of frustration, loss and disorientation. Like most of Kiefer's books "The Secret Life of Plants" is about reading but is not readable. The artist emphasises the impossibility to read and suggests grasping the secrets of the universe through senses. The plants are connected to each other through a complex network of lines, names, numbers doubling one another. This network implies calculation of

¹ Ibid. p. 350-351

² Ibid. pp. 65-66

something that appears beyond reasonable calculation, suggesting reading the unreadable – the world is rendered as a labyrinth, like in Paul Celan: “Unlesbarkeit dieser / Welt. Alles doppelt.”¹

The series "Geheimnis der Farne" (Mystery of the Fern) with dried ferns attached to the background of clay and emulsion on canvas is dedicated to Paul Celan. One can read the inscriptions: "Für Paul Celan," "Nachtschatten," "Mohn und Gedächtnis" handwritten on the canvas. The dried plants attached to the background of clay are silent and melancholic, they render whatever has been termed by Walter Benjamin as the "Verstummung der Natur" (muteness/silence of nature): „Here begins its (nature's) other muteness, that is meant by the deep sadness of nature. Inability to speak: this is the source of the greatest sadness of nature ... It mourns because it is mute. The inversion of this sentence would lead us even further into the essence of nature: the sadness of nature makes it mute. This is of all mourning the deepest tendency to speechlessness and it means endlessly more than the inability or lack of wish to communicate.“²

In his pieces with plants attached to the medial support Kiefer indicates the fracture that divides the human world from that of nature. The fracture of inability to communicate, the wedge between the human language and the language of nature. The language of art is no exception. It can be of more subliminal character but not necessarily reflecting the truth in its fullness. The profound melancholy, characteristic for Anselm Kiefer's work is to a great extent preconditioned by this human inability to grasp and to speak the divine language in its original sacred fullness. Neither human languages, nor the languages of art can convey divine knowledge, that remains misrepresented and misinterpreted.

In portraying melancholic sunflowers, palm branches, ferns, Kiefer shows that although people research nature, represent it in art and admire its beauty, they cannot fully understand it. Nature remains silent for us even in spite of the development of natural sciences. It remains absent, mysterious. Kiefer stresses the aspect of the unknown in plants in the titles of his works: „Geheimnis der Farne, Für Paul Celan“ (The Mystery of Ferns, for Paul Celan), „The Secret Life of Plants“. It is not only that each plant has a respective star in the sky but each

¹ Paul Celan, „Schneepart“

² "Nun beginnt ihre (Natures) andere Stummheit, die wir mit der tiefen Traurigkeit der Natur meinen. Sprachlosigkeit: das ist das große Leid der Natur ... Weil sie stumm ist trauert die Natur. Doch noch tiefer führt in das Wesen der Natur die Umkehrung dieses Satzes ein: die Traurigkeit der Natur macht sie verstummen. Es ist in aller Trauer der tiefste Hang zur Sprachlosigkeit, und das ist unendlich viel mehr als Unfähigkeit oder Unlust zur Mitteilung," W. Benjamin, *Medienästhetische Schriften*, p. 80

plant has a respective name in God, the name that has been forgotten and the plant consequently renamed: „In human languages, however, they (plants) are renamed ... Renaming is the deepest linguistic cause of all sadness and (observed from the viewpoint of the object) of all kinds of muteness."¹ In the book „The Secret Life of Plants“ with sunflowers and black seeds making up the contents of the pages, the complex network of numbers, words and sunflower images does not tell the secret of the plants but makes the mystery even more obscure.

To speak about the mysteries of certain plants like ferns - the oldest plants existing on earth in the contemporary age of techno-biological progress might seem at first glance inappropriate. Contemporary science seems to have disclosed all mysteries of nature. The mysteries of plants - remnants of some primordial knowledge are repressed in the collective memory, in myths. In primordial times and in antiquity vegetation was venerated as the sign of the sacred and of the divine. Plants had cultic importance, they used to commemorate the dead, certain mythological heroes turned into plants after death. Vegetation was supposed to represent on earth the universal, cosmic powers of regeneration and fertility.

Vegetation is rendered by Kiefer as the symbol of cosmic, universal forces related to the sacral aspects, reflected in the veneration of the vegetation deities in archaic times. The artist emphasises the cultic significance of plants that once played an important role in ancient initiation rituals and mystic doctrines that consequently were appropriated by the alchemists. The secret, mystic aspect of vegetation related to its divine, cosmic realm has never been entirely revealed to men, nature still remains a mystery to us, therefore it is represented secretive, esoteric, vested with complex occult meanings unknown to men.

According to Walter Benjamin the mystery of language was lost for ordinary humans. Muteness is the cause of nature's deepest melancholy. Revelation originally contained in the language given to men by God was lost after the divine language was translated into various profane languages of men. The mystery of the divine revelation was replaced by the functional tasks of languages, that serve practical purposes of communication, calculation, etc. The language of nature, of plants e.g. ferns or palms remains a mystery for ordinary men, like the universal divine language, it remains unintelligible.

¹ In der Sprache der Menschen aber sind sie (Pflanzen) überbenannt ... Überbenennung als tiefster sprachlicher Grund aller Traurigkeit und (vom Ding aus betrachtet) allen Verstummens, Ibid.

The double nature of language and its immanent sadness is evident in the poetry of Paul Celan for whom German was his native language and the language of the murderers, the Nazis as in "Muttersprache – Mördersprache," Theo Buck. For Celan, a Jewish-born German speaking poet, whose parents were killed in a concentration camp and who later ended his life with suicide, native German language like German nature instead of being nurturing and life-giving became poisonous like "black milk". In his poems the language sounds broken as if uprooted from its natural environment. It does not communicate but speaks of the inability to communicate, to name or to describe. The once lively native language is replaced with the silencing language of mourning.

Likewise the plants in the paintings dedicated to Paul Celan are represented by Kiefer uprooted, exiled from their native nurturing soil. Their roots and branches are stiff, silent, lifeless. These "mysterious" plants are taken from their original soil, their original nurturing habitation, dried up and attached to the heavily worked canvas. Kiefer symbolically dedicates the paintings with these plants to Paul Celan, the poet who was destined to become a stranger in his own land, doomed for constant exile, uprooted from whatever was native to him. Isolation from nature was often stressed by Celan, who identified himself with the "Rose der Fremde" (Alien Rose) (GW I, 23). Anyone alienated from nature is consequently alienated from society. Paul Celan referred to his existence as an outsider which was the traumatic reality of being Jewish: "Then 'a veil hangs over your eyes, that hinders your sight ('half image and half veil,' 'poor martagon, poor rampion! (...) you do not bloom, you are not available, and July is not July,' 'half veil and half star'. Exclusion from nature means likewise exclusion from society. The negative social status provokes compassion towards the one who realises it and simultaneously acknowledges the role of an outsider."¹

For Celan, who was acutely aware of the beauty of his native land, nature has always been mute, contaminated with the sense of exclusion and unavailability. The native landscapes, even before they were actually distorted by war, were already from the beginning deserted, deformed and distorted due to the experience of exclusion and muteness that they conveyed,

¹ "Denn 'in Augen hängt ihnen der Schleier' (GW III, 170), der ihre Sicht beeinträchtigt ('halb Bild und halb Schleier,' 'Armer Türkenbund, arme Rapunzel! (...) ihr steht nicht und blüht nicht, ihr seid nicht vorhanden, und der Juli ist kein Juli,' 'halb Schleier und halb Stern' (GW III, 170-172.) Ausgeschlossen sein von der Natur, das heißt ebenso Ausgeschlossen sein von der Gesellschaft. Der negative gesellschaftliche Befund provoziert geradezu Mit-Leiden des Erkennenden und damit das Bekenntnis zur Außenseiterrolle," Theo Buck, Celan-Studien, Muttersprache Mördersprache, p. 43

the way they appear in Kiefer's paintings: deserted and devastated by war. These landscapes and plants although they might appear welcoming and beautiful, have never even been native, since from the very beginning for someone of Jewish origin they were already poisoned with "the black milk" of silence, alienation and estrangement. (*Pic. 59. Geheimnis der Farne, (Mystery of the Ferns), 2006, 190 x 140 cm, clay, branches, emulsion under glass, below in the middle inscription: "Nachtschatten" /Night Shadows/*)

The position of an outsider in society has always been the position of an artist. To a certain extent Kiefer identifies himself with Paul Celan as a painter who was initially misinterpreted in his own country, as an artist who questioned the possibility of practising art after Auschwitz. Kiefer demonstrates the condition of an artist in a world that cannot be affected by art or by nature. By putting dried plants under glass and placing them in a museum space, by presenting as artworks the framed plants treated with colour pigment and chemical substances Anselm Kiefer demonstrates nature as uprooted, excluded and misinterpreted. He also demonstrates the inability of art to reveal the mystery of these plants, which indicates the basic inability of art to reveal much about nature, or about myths related to them, as well as the inability of art to change the barbaric course of history. "... Art co-exists with all this, but it cannot change the world. The monstrosity of the events in Germany is the combination of fascism and of perfectionism. An alliance of high technology and a criminal formation at its peak. Art, poetry do not have the power to oppose such cruelty, such infamy, such brutality. But in spite of this and because of this, the task of art, if you ask me, is to survive."¹

In the sculpture "For Paul Celan - Ukraine", 2005, dry sunflowers are stuck between volumes of lead books. The pile of closed books and the sunflowers with the heads down speak of the impossibility to communicate to the reader and to the viewer the volumes of estrangement and loneliness that turn the sculpture into a monument to silence, non-acceptance. The life of a plant is thus related to the life of a book and to the existence of an artwork that is more often than not misunderstood, muted and turned into an object on show.

¹ "L'art coexiste avec tout ça, mais il ne peut pas changer le monde. La monstrosité de l'événement en Allemagne, c'est une combinaison de fascisme et de perfectionisme. Une alliance d'une haute technicité et d'une forme criminelle poussée à son comble. L'art, la poésie n'ont pas la puoier de s'opposer à cette cruauté, à cette infamie, à cette brutalité. Mais malgré cela et à cause de cela le rôle de l'art pour moi, ce de survivre," Interview with Anselm Kiefer in Paul Ardenne, Pierre Assouline, Anselm Kiefer, Chute d'Etoiles, Sternenfall, Monumenta, p. 328

Airplanes

Anselm Kiefer's airplanes are dysfunctional military machines made of crude sheets of hammered lead with books, geometric objects, dried flowers, straw and glass put on the wings. The surface of the wings and of the corpus is rough, they are far from up-to-date standards. In fact this obsolete military machinery is not intended for flying. Anselm Kiefer opposes the art of flying with the impossibility to fly, that is inscribed into his airplane installations. They repeat the destiny of Icarus whose flight ended in downfall. "Elisabeth", 1990, a sculpture of a lead airplane, "Journey to the End of Night" (Voyage au bout de la nuit), 1990, "Poppy and Memory" (Mohn und Gedächtnis) are airplanes, confined to the gallery space. These winged machines appear to be victims, since they are out of purpose and do not belong to the space where the artist puts them. Kiefer's lead airplanes correspond to the fallen angels, who like Walter Benjamin's "Angel of History" will never fly.¹

The evocation of Paul Celan and Walter Benjamin in the title of the sculpture "Poppy and Memory" intensifies the melancholic sadness characteristic for Kiefer's art. As Walter Benjamin wrote in his "Angel of History" "the nature of this sadness stands out more clearly if one asks with whom the adherents of historicism actually emphasise. The answer is inevitable: with the victor. And all rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them. Hence empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers. Whoever has emerged victorious, participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to a traditional practice the spoils are carried along in the procession. They are called cultural treasures and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. Without exception cultural treasures have an origin which one cannot contemplate without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great minds and talents, who have created them but also to the anonymous toil of their contemporaries. There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to the other."²

¹ Walter Benjamin's „Angel of History“ turned his gaze towards the past, terrified by the wind of the so-called progress that came from the paradise and that threatened with the storm of imminent catastrophe. In writing his "Angel of History" Walter Benjamin was inspired by Paul Klee's water-colour „Angelus Novus“ which he acquired in 1921

² Walter Benjamin, „Über den Begriff der Geschichte“, Gesammelte Schriften, Vol. 1, p. 696

The melancholy of Walter Benjamin's historical experience is caused by a sense of irrevocable violence in history that cannot be prevented by art and cultural tradition. The perception of history as catastrophe starting from Isaac Luria's Kabbala has been a fundamental characteristic of Jewish thought, that found its further expression in the works of Walter Benjamin and in the poetry of Paul Celan. What in traditional Western interpretation of history is referred to as progress, is for Walter Benjamin actually a regress, a devastating, barbaric storm that eliminates any hope of a positive, progressive development. Kiefer's sculptures „Mohn und Gedächtnis – der Angel der Geschichte“, 1990, and „Melancholia“, 1991, render the angel of history as a dysfunctional airplane made of poisonous lead.

In „Mohn und Gedächtnis“ (Poppy and Memory) the airplane symbolising the angel is loaded with books and dried plants. The inability of the monumental machine to fly as well as the impossibility to read the heavy lead books placed on the aircraft's wings renders the feeling of hopelessness. The monumental lead airplane correlates with Benjamin's angel - a heavenly creature that became a victim of the aggressive materiality of the machine. The incompatibility of the idea of a heavenly angel with the rough materiality of a huge earth bound lead aircraft (250 x 630 x 650 cm) reveals that in spite of the contemporary civilisation based on technological progress, that made possible to construct such sophisticated machinery as airplanes, violence and barbarity have not ceased to exist. On the contrary military airplanes have been purposefully designed and extensively used as devastation machines. Anselm Kiefer alludes here to the epoch of modernity which was hailed as the epoch of technological progress, during which machines: trains, automobiles, airplanes were invented, but which nevertheless gave rise to fascism in Europe. Trains and airplanes were used to wage wars, they served some of the most atrocious regimes in history – e.g. the Nazi regime in Germany. Trains for example were extensively used by the Nazis to transport Jews to the death camps. Kiefer emphasises here that technological progress was thus used not for the peaceful purposes but as the tool for warfare.

The lead air plane of the "Melancholia" (1989) titled after Durer's painting is loaded with a glass polyhedron. Like in Durer's picture here as well the transparent polyhedron even though it is filled with waste, is the symbol of the unchangeable values of wisdom, balance, order. Its calculated geometric precision stresses the continuity of certain universal scientific values in spite of the barbarism of history. Formally the smooth, transparent shape of the polyhedron

contradicts the rough, uneven and opaque shape of the dysfunctional airplane. Barbarity and civilisation coexist in Kiefer's installation, one burdening the other.

Both the airplane and the polyhedron are built as a result of precise scientific calculations. Making a machine requires certain knowledge that indicates a high level of civilisation symbolised by the polyhedron that stands for geometric precision, equilibrium, scientific knowledge and experimentation. Both the airplane and the polyhedron are products of meticulous mathematical calculations that can serve practical purposes of air-navigation or military tasks. Human ambition to fly has been finally realised in the epoch of modernity when the first airplanes were built. Yet the technological progress based on practical use of accumulated scientific knowledge turned out to be ambiguous: used in military purposes it gave rise to disasters of war, destructions of unprecedented character.

Scientific-technological progress is rendered by Kiefer as superficial and illusory. It is compared to the airplane that creates the illusion of its ability to fly. The transparent glass polyhedron enabling the spectator to look through its sides is filled with rubbish. Polyhedron as well as the airplane stands for mankind's progress, that for Kiefer remains morally questionable, ambiguous, even spiritually regressive, headed, like the gaze of Walter Benjamin's "angel of history" backwards towards the inevitable degradation. The monumentality of the airplane, of the polyhedron and of the lead books on the airplane wings stresses the physical aspect that seems to exclude the spiritual. Kiefer's airplane is not the spectacular technologically upgraded machine but a dysfunctional object unable to fly. With its heavily loaded wings it is compared to Benjamin's melancholy angel horrified by future. Moreover the inherent opposition of the heavenly, immaterial, celestial aspects characteristic for an angel are opposed to the rough physical structure of the lead airplane. This allows to analyse the idea of an angel as ambivalent: Kiefer refers here to the fallen angel, the Satan, to the tradition of identifying a serpent with a fallen angel, to the custom of regarding angels as avengers for God's justice without being therefore evil spirits. All these meanings conflate in Kiefer's image of a melancholic airplane symbolising the "angel of history" that is rendered fallen, trapped, unable to soar up. The accent on the failure might also imply the failure of any artistic project to reveal the truth or make visible the invisible.

The Archive

Anselm Kiefer's double sculpture with two titles: "High Priestess" in English and "Zweistromland" in German comprises 200 books, their bindings and pages are made of lead foils. Seventy of these similar in size but various in weight books are reworked, some of the volumes weigh over 300 kg. The books contain mainly photos of various subjects, collaged materials like hair, dried peas, various emulsions, red or yellow-brown clay and silver, in seldom cases painterly accents are made with brush. The industrially prepared and rolled sheets of lead were, before being cut, folded and bound, soldered together, placed for a period of time in Kiefer's atelier, on the paths, in the courts among the rubble. The folds, scratches, bumps, cracks and fissures form the complex rugged surface of the pages. The rough surface allows to follow the process of working on the matter. The colour spectrum varying between dark grey and white ochre with touches of reddish, greenish and yellowish is obtained as a result of gathering of micro-organisms during the oxidation, resulting from poisonous elements in the air, humidity and warmth.

The English title "High Priestess" refers to the "tarot" - a card game that has been played across Europe from the 15th century on. The seventy-eight cards of the tarot deck have been used not only for playing but specifically in the aims of divination and for esoteric purposes by mystics in search of revelation of the nature of the universe and of men. The images on the cards that were originally hand painted by prominent artists of the time have symbolic meaning, with the colours related to the four basic elements of air, fire earth and water. The twenty-two tarot trump cards of the deck are related to the Major Arcana or great, universal mysteries ("arcanum" meaning a mystery, secret). Whereas the Minor Arcana including fifty-six cards is related to the minor, lesser secrets. Each trump card is numbered and is related to a particular letter of the Hebraic alphabet. The mysteries of the arcana to which the tarot cards are related have origins in the Egyptian esoteric teachings, in the Jewish Cabbala, as well as in alchemy and astrology. The secrets of the arcana are believed to be revealed to adepts as a result of their spiritual quest which is also perceived as the way of self-discovery and self-perfection. The twenty-two tarot trump cards with their mysterious symbolic meanings are sometimes interpreted as symbols of a spiritual journey of ascending the twenty-two mental stages of cognition.

The origins of the tarot cards are not completely clear up to now. According to the game

procedure the 22 cards of four colours with swords, staffs, tumblers and coins complete to the object of imaginative speculations. The most consequential of those who wrote on the game was Court de Gébelin, a French scholar at the end of the 18th century, who related the occult-oriented game to the free-masonry. He supported the view that the tarots comprised an Egyptian book of wisdom, however any further research could not find a single point of reference to his statements. In the image tradition the second main card of the tarot is represented as a woman with a tiara - from which comes the French naming 'La Papesse', the Priestess, who occasionally sits by the sea between two columns holding an open, partly covered book or a scroll upon the knees. 'The High Priestess' symbolises, as it were, the mystery of pure cognition, an act of Gnosis.¹ The High Priestess is traditionally identified with the Shekhinah. The veil of the Temple behind her, is embroidered with palm leaves and pomegranates, the fruit of wisdom. In his installation Kiefer referring to the tarot cards with their implied mysteries and the promise of disclosure, puts them into our contemporary cultural context as if trying to compare the ancient Mesopotamian civilisation of Zweistromland to that of today.

As Giorgio Agamben points out, Schechina, to which the title the High Priestess is related, is the last of the ten Sefirot or attributes of God, and in fact the one that gives expression to the divine presence itself; she is the manifestation, the dwelling of the divine upon the earth: its "word."² Kiefer's installation – the lead library refers to the word, to the language that appears to be forgotten and hidden from men. The state of obliteration, disappearance and collapse that characterises the installation conveys the sense of exile. The pieces of broken glass, referring to the irreparable damage and temporariness together with the inscriptions and images in the books that are made to appear undecipherable or imperceptible by obscuring or wearing away, refer to forgetting, to the exile and to erasure from memory. The installation analyses the state of exile that is ascribed by Cabbalists to Schechina, the exile or better the division that originated in language.

Cabbalists believed that it was "Adam himself as the representative of mankind who initiated this division. He explained the knowledge the way he found it appropriate and within his capabilities, thus separating the knowledge (cognition) from the word, the most perfect form

¹ Der Anonymus D'Outre Tombe, *Die Großen Arcana des Tarot*. Basel 1983, Bd. I, p. 29 ff.; Bd. 2, p. 329 ff. cited after Armin Zweite, "Anselm Kiefer. Zweistromland," pp. 99-100

² Giorgio Agamben, *Die Kommende Gemeinschaft*, p. 74

of divine manifestation (Schechina). It was separated from the other Sefiroth, in which God reveals himself. *The Word – the disclosure and revelation of anything – threatens to separate itself from whatever it reveals, and to exist independently.* The revealed and the manifest (and simultaneously the common and accessible) Being separates itself from the manifest things and emerges between them and the people. In the isolation of such an exile Schechina loses its positive influence and becomes evil ...”¹

In his installation Kiefer brings to attention the revelatory aspect of the Biblical language, comparing it to the role of language in the occult teachings e.g. that of the tarot used for esoteric purposes. He emphasises the importance of language in ancient civilisations, like that of Mesopotamia, considering all these within the context of our contemporary culture. The emphasis on the break, corrosion and the collapse evident in the installation underpins among others the incompatibility, isolation and the break of continuity. The library is out of context today, forgotten and isolated from our everyday reality.

The word appears to have lost its original revelatory and communicative function, thus becoming an impediment to the manifestation of truth. As Giorgio Agamben points out “indeed the exile of Schechina together with the society of spectacle enters the phase, when language not only builds up an autonomous field but also ceases to reveal anything – or better, it reveals Nothingness of all. Neither God, nor the world, nothing manifest, nothing of all this is yet present in language...”² “...in the society of spectacle the communicability (i.e. the language) ... is assigned an isolated realm operating according to the laws of its own. It is the communicability itself that prevents communication; people are separated by whatever is meant to unite them. Journalists and mediocrats are the new priests of the alienation of this linguistic nature of men ... Whatever makes the nations of the world united in their common destiny even more than economic problems and technological developments, is the exile of

¹ „Wie diese erklärt er (Adam) das Wissen zu seiner Bestimmung und dem ihm eigentlichen Vermögen, trennt also die Erkenntnis und das Wort, die nichts anderes sind als die vollkommenste Form, in der sich Gott manifestiert (die Schechina), von den anderen Sefiroth, in denen Gott sich offenbart, trennt. *Das Wort - also die Unverborgenheit und die Offenbarung von irgend etwas – droht sich von dem abzulösen, was es offenbart, und abhängig von diesem zu bestehen.* Das geoffenbarte und manifestierte (und mithin gemeinsame und teilbare) Sein trennt sich von der geoffenbarten Sache und tritt zwischen sie und die Menschen. In der Abgeschiedenheit dieses Exils verliert die Schechina ihre positive Wirkung und wird böseartig ...“ Ibid. p. 75

² „Tatsächlich tritt die Absonderung der Schechina mit der Gesellschaft des Spektakels in einer Phase, in der die Sprache nicht nur einen autonomen Bereich bildet, sondern auch nichts mehr offenbart – oder besser, das Nichts aller Dinge offenbart, weder Gott, noch die Welt, nichts Offenbartes, nichts von all dem ist noch in der Sprache anwesend...”² Giorgio Agamben, *Die Kommende Gemeinschaft*, p. 75

the linguistic being, the uprooting of all the peoples from their native linguistic environment.”¹

The installation's German title “Zweistromland” refers to ancient Mesopotamia, the name literally means the land between the two rivers: the Tigris and the Euphrates. Mesopotamia was the origin of one of the oldest civilisations in the world, where writing was invented. Such ancient cities as Nineveh, Uruk, Babylon thrived on its territory as well as the Akkadian Kingdom and the Assyrian Empire. In terms of literature to which Kiefer's installation refers, the Akkadian literature written in the Akkadian and in the Babylonian languages is one of the oldest in the world. One of the most famous works created in Mesopotamia was the Epic of Gilgamesh, together with mythology on creation, philosophical texts as well as the code of Hammurabi, one of the earliest written laws in the world.

Literature dedicated to divination purposes, incantation texts and omens makes up an essential part of the literary heritage of Mesopotamia. Omen texts including interpretations of dreams, astrological and terrestrial phenomena were assembled and developed into canonical form. Ancient Mesopotamian libraries used to accommodate books on divination, incantation literature and texts on extispicy.

The title of Kiefer's library installation that refers to the ancient Mesopotamian literary heritage as well as to the High Priestess of the tarot suggests that there exists a certain continuity between the Babylonian divination texts and the occult practices related to the tarot cards. The knowledge, traditions related to divination, fortunetelling, forecasting of the future, assembled in the Mesopotamian texts and preserved in writing have not been lost but archived, reinterpreted and assimilated within the divinatory practices related to the tarot cards. The library emphasises the medium of the language that is essential in the preservation of these esoteric practices. It is also crucial that the installation focuses on the aspect of rupture indicating the break of this tradition. The language that for centuries served the revelatory purposes, the goals of communication, prediction of the future for the common

¹ „...ist es in der Gesellschaft des Spektakels die Mitteilbarkeit (d.h. die Sprache), der ein abgeschiedener, nach eigenen Gesetzen funktionierender Bereich zugewiesen wird. Es ist die Mitteilbarkeit selber, die die Mitteilung verhindert; die Menschen werden durch das getrennt, was sie vereint. Journalisten und Mediokraten sind die neuen Priester dieser Entfremdung der sprachlicher Natur des Menschen ... Was die Nationen der Welt, mehr noch als ökonomische Zwänge oder technologische Entwicklungen, zu einer Schicksalgemeinschaft werden lässt, ist die Entfremdung des sprachlichen Seins, die Entwurzelung aller Völker aus ihrem sprachlichen Lebensraum,“ Ibid., pp. 75-76

good is nowadays unable to carry on this mission. Instead it is being abused for political and ideological purposes, its revelatory character has been inflated, which results in the desecration of the language and in the “exile” of the Schechina, as Agamben writes. The revelatory, sacral functions of language have been ignored. It has been assigned to the realm of the archive away from our daily reality. In contemporary society language has become the tool for political or commercial manipulation.

(Pic. 60. Zweistromland - the High Priestess, 1985-1989, 500 x 800 x 100 cm, about 200 books of lead, on steel shelves, with glass and copper cords)

The installation *Zweistromland - the High Priestess* analyses the borderline between the secular world outside the archive and the enclosed realm within. It points out the discrepancy between the two realms. The archive logic of collecting for the sake of preservation of humanity's cultural heritage for the common good is practically useless for contemporary consumer oriented mind that operates in terms of (Sinn und Zweck) rational categories of definite goals and common sense. Modern technology enhances the availability of media by providing on-line books, portable items, books for listening. On the contrary, the books assembled in Kiefer's archive are heavy, hardly accessible, difficult to re-move, to open, to look through. One is required not only mental, but also physical effort to study such an archive. Taking the books from the shelves, turning their pages, decoding their content is a complicated process that consumes time, physical energy and mental effort. The purpose (Sinn) of creating such an archive seems irrelevant, beyond any common sense. The archive appears as the purpose in itself, as the topos where books are kept for the coming generations. This archive symbolically stands for our common cultural heritage that has to be remembered, that is neither for sale nor spectacle. Kiefer never mentions why these books are assembled on the shelves or what are the criteria of their selection. The inner nature of the archive, the forces and the rules that guide the process of collecting and deciding, what goes into the archive and what not are hidden from the spectator.

It is the process itself of creating such an archive that is important. This process is made visible in the form of traces that time, weather and human intrusion left upon the exhibited artefacts. The scratches, fissures, organic substances attached to the book pages convey the sense of the physical presence of the library in time, they create the illusion of the long timespan over which the library has existed.

Kiefer emphasises the timeless character of his library archive. The images in the books refer to ancient Mesopotamian cities reduced to ruin, e.g. photos of stone mastabas of Ninife, Uruk etc. The spectator is invited to study the volumes on the shelves, the cords, the glass vessels with water, books made of cardboard and document paper. One can also look through the contents of these books: photos and brief texts. There is discrepancy between the visual effect of heaviness, immobility and opacity of the books themselves opposed to the illusion of lightness and transparency of the images that the books contain - photos of clouds, gleaming water surfaces, hair attached to lead pages, views of cities from above. These transparent, lucid images convey lightness and serenity.

Kiefer's lead libraries thematise the centuries-old practice of gathering, ordering of objects, placing them within archive, museum or library spaces. The rationale behind the process of collection remains unknown to the spectator. Nevertheless the artist is fascinated with the idea of collecting, of preserving mankind's common heritage. Such an archive is inevitable for our cultural tradition preserved for centuries in language in the ancient books that define our common collective memory. (*Pic. 61. Book #24, 1985-1989, of the sculpture Zweistromland - The High Priestess*)

In the "60 Million Peas" - an installation comprising lead books with dried peas pressed between the pages, it is the state,¹ as anonymous arbitrary power, that collects the data about the population. It is however unknown for what purposes, where and when this data will be used. Both those behind the coulisses, manipulating the process and those whose data is assembled on the archive shelves remain hidden, anonymous components of the installation. The violence implied by the state control mechanisms is evident not only in the rigid form of the sculpture but also in the rough, tortured texture of the books arranged on the shelves. The crude heaviness of lead counterpoints the organic nature of the dried plants stuck between the lead pages. The is sculpture made of strict geometrically arranged rectangles of the lead books, placed within the severe rectangular bookcases forming an enclosed square. The lead surveillance camera installed between the shelves indicates the rigid rational system of institutional control that imposes its ruthless order upon everything living.

¹ The title of the installation refers to the German national census of 1987 in which Kiefer refused to participate

Here again the theme of an archive is essential. This time the archive contains the data of state control and government surveillance apparatus. Similar theme appeared earlier in Kiefer's work in the painting "Star Camp" (Sternenlager). The work suggests a concentration camp where the Holocaust victims are abstracted to the meticulously numbered rectangles stored on the symmetrically arranged rows of shelves vanishing in the central perspective. One senses the tragic aura about this archive: the encoded data preserved on the shelves relates to once living persons, who probably no longer exist, whose existence is reduced to mere impersonal numbers, whereas the volumes containing the coded data survive the living and replace them. "Sternenlager" conveys the sense of subtle, disguised violence. Disappearance is emphasised in the painting by the vanishing perspective that corresponds to the vanishing of the concentration camps victims. Once again the forces operating behind the archive, those selecting, giving orders, arranging items on shelves are left unknown, hidden, anonymously implementing the ruthless logic of collecting. In spite of formal similarities there is an obvious difference between the archives containing books – the storages of mankind's cultural heritage and the archives containing abstract coded data supposed for the purposes of surveillance, political control and ideological manipulation. The archive of the "Sternenlager" and of the "60 Million Peas" installation is not obliterated by time, it is not out of context with our contemporary reality. On the contrary it directly refers to our contemporary socio-political system where everything is under state control. The archive containing "60 Million Peas" is very well kept and upgraded with state-of-the-art equipment: the surveillance camera. There are no evident traces of damage, fracture and decay. Unlike the "Zweistromland..." library that is given to oblivion and is irreparably damaged by time, this archive seems to be in high demand in the society that is organised like a prison as Michael Foucault claimed.

Kiefer's libraries of lead and steel are artificial spaces placed within bigger spaces e.g. museums, galleries, cultural institutions. These installations imitate the artificially created spaces for high culture, placed within the profane realm of the secular everyday reality. Cultural heritage and its treasures are supposed to be timeless, whereas the media itself, the books, the shelves, the vessels are purposefully rendered by the artist as short-lived, subject to damage and destruction in time. The archive outlives those who created it, obsoleting their short-lived goals and purposes. Its content survives time yet like everything else on earth it is subject to disappearance and forgetting.

The installation "Break of the Vessels" (Bruch der Gefäße) 1989-90 refers to the Kabbala myth on Shevirat-ha-Kelim. The myth relates to the creation process, during which the vessels that were intended to contain God's light turned out to be too weak for its sacral force and shattered. The Shevirat-ha-Kelim - Hebraic for the break of the vessels is considered to be a universal catastrophe that will hopefully be restored during the process of the so-called "tikkun" - a Cabbala term indicating reparation. Yet the Cabbalists believe that for the time being all the imperfections and evils existing in our world came into being due to this catastrophic fracture of the vessels.

For Kiefer the concept of break is of profound importance, fracture, shattering as a continuous process is one of his major artistic motives. The theme of the break acquires in his pieces substantial critical and subversive impact that refers to the analysis of events not only related to the historical past but also to the present. The process of break is analysed by Kiefer as the persistent state of the universe, break is also the critique subtly evident in Kiefer's art, directed against the existent socio-political order and mentality that has to be remedied, restored. Yet the theme of break in the Kabbala is far more wide and semantically charged than the above-mentioned examples. Kiefer touches in his works upon these universal-cosmic dimensions of the break in the monumental scale of his work, in the choice of materials e.g. lead, glass splinters, ash. He emphasises the sense of impossibility of repair, the universal collapse by the choice of the monochromatic colour palette, as well as the accent on the traces of obsolescence, obliteration of the materials indicating the inevitable entropy, disappearance and loss. The "Break of the Vessels" consists of steel shelves with lead volumes and sheets of splintered glass scattered around. Shevirat-ha-Kelim is in a certain sense the universe apart described in the myth of creation, the universe that is scattered, devastated. The earth is the reflection of this universe (as above so below, as the Alchemists claimed). Break as torture, agony is the evident reflection of the human condition in the world - that of suffering from the disasters of wars, social and political injustices, etc. The break refers not only to episodes from the History of Jews: the devastation of the Temple in Jerusalem, the permanent exiles and persecutions of Jews throughout Middle Ages, the Holocaust but also to the history of mankind and to our contemporary reality with its evils.

The holy vessels containing according to the Kabbala myth the divine light, are compared to books that are supposed to contain divine knowledge. And it is up to men to read them or as

Kabbalists say to repair the shattered vessels.

In Kiefer's installations with books the process of their creation is evident, the same way as the signs of the imminent disappearance. Generally the history of a library, an archive as a space for knowledge and memory reflects the history of mankind, with its respective stages of creation, collection of items, their placement in a certain order and their gradual destruction in time. "History as the compendium of wisdom and knowledge" (Rudi Fuchs) is contained in the archive in a logically arranged form. Books contained in libraries preserve for mankind fragments of human knowledge. Yet a library is always isolated from the outer world and can hardly influence the course of events outside its walls.

The motive of break and obliteration evident in Kiefer's rendering of his book installations refers to knowledge and wisdom as fragmentary, incomplete, impaired. One remembers here the myth of Osiris according to which his body was fragmented into separate parts. Here as well the motive of division, of fragmentation is essential. It is not accidental that the myth of Osiris and Isis is a repetitive theme with Kiefer. The fate of Osiris, regarded as (archetypus intellectus), his "way" corresponds to the fate, "the way of wisdom" in the world, which is the way of forgetting, fragmentation, disappearing. Osiris is also the mythological symbol of exile into the underworld. The process of disappearance is translated by Kiefer into the visual aesthetic of ruin, which is in turn echoed in history by the physical destruction of for example once thriving civilisations of antiquity: such as Mesopotamia - the Zweistromland.

The Germanic myth of Siegfried and Brunhilde also renders the motive of forgetting which Kiefer emphasises in the inscriptions to his paintings "Siegfried vergisst Brunhilde." For Kiefer forgetting equals disappearing, rendered as a road vanishing in the perspective, in the winter landscape, as in the painting "Siegfried Forgets Brunhilde". Death through fragmentation (Osiris myth), burning in sacrificial fire (Brunhilde) equaled to forgetting is thematised in these works as the inevitable end and as the possibility of resurrection if we consider the ever-present symbols of vegetation and nature in Kiefer's works.

Kiefer's lead libraries, sculptures, towers, monumental "palaces" - emphasise temporariness, fracture that makes them monuments to disappearance. These works render a continuous progress towards regression into the original state of nothingness, towards the end, reduction to the ashes, where form disappears into formlessness, to become one with mother earth, and

with the eternal waters, to turn into the larva, into the original nucleus. The vicious circle thus closes here as in the myth about Siegfried and Brunhilde after whose death the legendary ring of the Nibelungs disappears in the depths of the Rein.

The progress towards the end is also the way towards the new the beginning. The end, the death in mythologies of antiquity was followed by regeneration and the eventual rebirth, like in the myth of Persephone, the goddess of the underworld, who used to go down into the underworld and then again back to the earth surface. This cycle reflects the perennial cycle of nature, of vegetation that blooms in spring and summer, to wither and disappear in winter – hence the importance of the motive of winter landscapes with Kiefer. Snow-covered landscapes with sleeping nature are related to disappearance and to death. The cycle of death and rebirth, withering and disappearance followed by growth is connected to the universal, bio-cosmic cycles. The beginning - the theme that recurrently appears in Kiefer's art is also subtly related to the end. He constantly touches upon these two interrelated topics, comparing these two phases, emphasising the cycle, particularly that of nature by introducing into his works symbols of vegetation: branches of fern, dried plants, withered roses, brambles, patches of soil.

In the opera "Au commencement" (In the Beginning) to the music of Jorg Widmann, performed in 2009 at the Opera Bastille, for which Kiefer prepared stage settings and costumes, the artist thematises the beginning as a continuous, painful process of agony, of fighting with the original chaos resulting in the emergence of form from the formlessness, from ash and rubble. One can hardly differentiate the beginning from the end. According to the Bible "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). In the Kabbala doctrine in the beginning God retreated making room for the world to come. The cumulation of concrete rubble, ash, ruin with the costumes and the settings in the tones of ash grey represent the restless spirit of the world in process, the infinite construction and destruction, the rhythm of chaos being replaced by order and vice versa.

The initial Biblical word of God is conveyed in the opera through music, which was presumed by Derrida as the origin of speech. Music as the predecessor of speech is the essential component of Widmann's opera – it is here the music of the beginning, or better, one

could say that in the beginning was music, the music of rubble and ash. Music tunes corresponding to the syllables of the initial words were arranged originally into the rhythm of poems that could be chanted to divine melodies before they became the words of prose.

Anselm Kiefer, a visual artist, translates the process of fragmentation of language and of music into the shattering of glass, splintering of clay, collapse of concrete structures whose rubbles are scattered all over the stage. The opera “Am Anfang” interprets the world as a universal theatre of creation and destruction attuned to the music perceived as a cosmic element, where dissonance and harmony coexist and interrelate.

Kiefer's set of works related to the theme of the beginning “Am Anfang” that except from his work on Widmann's opera also includes a painting having the same title relates to the beginning of history. It is also the beginning that irrevocably refers to the sacral time, the time of the origin, the so-called primordial mythological time when the archetypes were introduced and the divine revelation took place. The sacral time is irrevocably related to the beginning, it is trans-historic and relates each moment of our profane time to the eternal and to the timeless. The beginning in mythology is related to the *illud tempus*, the time that is both now and always. It relates the historical time as well as to the eternal.

Each ritual, each re-enactment of the beginning like e.g. its representation in art: in painting or as the opera for which Kiefer developed the settings, relocates the spectator from the profane everyday reality into the sacral time, introducing the spectator to the realm of the eternal, transhistoric and the archetypal. The time of the myth coincides¹ with the time of history, since it has been believed that myth initiated history and whatever happens in history has already taken place in mythology, which is the archetypal model of whatever occurs in history.

In his works Kiefer interrelates, compares and juxtaposes the two realms: myth versus history is the coincidence of the mythological with the historical, the initiation of the events that happen in myth into the historical time. Simultaneously the incompatibility of the two aspects is evident: the mythological time, the beginning, the *illud tempus* is not chronological, it is cyclical and characterised by the eternal recurrence “ewiger wiederkehr,”² whereas historical

¹ M. Eliade, *Die Religionen und das Heilige*, p. 457

² *Ibid.*, p. 456

time is the chronological succession of phenomena and events that appear and disappear in due time.

Through the rituals and re-enactments the sacred mythological time reveals itself within the profane time in which human history takes place: “A ritual is the repetition of a fragment of the primordial time. And 'the primordial time serves as the model for all times. What once happened, repeats itself again and again.' (G.van der Leeuw, *L'homme primitif et la religion*, Paris 1940, pp. 120, 101) ... Yet, the sacral time, although it is transhistoric, beyond all the contingencies, as it in a certain way belongs to eternity, has the 'beginning' *in history*, it is the moment, when the God created or organised the world ... For the archaic thought each beginning is the *illud tempus*, therefore the opening towards the Big Time, towards the eternity ... Indeed each of these 'religious rituals' repeats again and again the archetype, repeats whatever took place in the beginning ... These archetypal events were revealed in *illo tempore*, in the non-chronological time, in the mythical time, and by revealing themselves they broke through into the profane time. They set the 'beginning,' the 'event,' that established itself in the grey, monotonous perspective of the profane course of time and thus gave rise to 'history', the chain of 'logical' events – the chain of events that is different from the chain of automatic and insignificant events, that occur and disappear in the profane time.”¹

¹ “Ein Ritus ist die Wiederholung eines Bruchstücks der Urzeit. Und 'die Urzeit dient als Modell für alle Zeiten. Was dereinst geschehen ist, wiederholt sich immer wieder.'... (G.van der Leeuw, *L'homme primitif et la religion*, Paris 1940, pp. 120, 101) Die sakrale Zeit hat, obwohl sie transhistorisch ist, jenseits aller Kontingenz, in gewisser Weise in der Ewigkeit liegt, doch einen 'Anfang' *in der Geschichte*, das ist der Augenblick, in dem die Gottheit die Welt geschaffen oder geordnet hat ... Für archaische Anschauung ist jeder Anfang ein *illud tempus*, daher eine Öffnung auf die Große Zeit, auf die Ewigkeit hinaus ... Tatsächlich wiederholt jedes dieser 'religiösen Dinge' immer wieder den Archetypus, wiederholt das, was im 'Anbeginn' stattgefunden hat ... Diese archetypischen Handlungen sind in *illo tempore* geoffenbart worden, in einer nicht chronologischen, mythischen Zeit, und haben, in dem sie sich offenbarten, die profane Zeit durchbrochen. Sie haben einen 'Anbeginn', ein 'Ereignis' gesetzt, das sich in die graue, einförmige Perspektive des profanen Zeitablaufseinfügt und so die 'Geschichte', die Reihe 'sinnvoller Ereignisse' aufgebaut – eine Reihe, die sich unterscheidet von der Reihe der automatischen und nichts bedeutenden Handlungen, die in der profanen Zeit erscheinen und verschwinden,“ M. Eliade, *Die Religionen und das Heilige*, pp. 455-457

Epilogue

Themes from archaic mythologies, the Kabbala lore, alchemical doctrines, Biblical motives make up the core of Anselm Kiefer's artistic production. His works single out the relationship between myth and history, or better, myth versus history resulting in the coincidence of the mythical and the historical. On the other hand the works allow to trace the incompatibilities between the sacral aspects related to the realm of the myth versus the logical, consequential, chronological order of historical timeline. The mythological aspect is opposed to the historical revealing the incommensurability of the universal eternity reflected in myths as compared to the events that make up mankind's history. These incompatibilities are often rendered as the repetitive motive of break, the ultimate ruin that is characteristic for Kiefer's oeuvre.

Mythological motives are reinterpreted within the conditions of our contemporary reality, the artist often shifts the contexts, making new accents, offering new reading of ancient myths. The historical dimension of his art allows one to analyse current socio-political processes within the light of the past. History is rendered as a succession of wars, violence, destructions resulting in the disappearance of whole civilisations. On the other hand mythology allows one to see into the future, to understand the universal laws of existence, that art can render in image. Jesaja's prophesy: "Over your cities grass will grow..." is the guiding theme with Anselm Kiefer as it forebodes the fate of our civilisation, like that of civilisations before, the fate of oblivion and disappearance.

What is the role of an artist in the contemporary world? What has been the role of an artist before, throughout history? Is the role of art that of Athena's polished shield supposed to reflect, to show whatever is hidden, unknown or unbearable to be looked at, as in the Greek myth about Gorgon Medusa and Perseus? For Kiefer the role of an artist has always been questionable. As he analyses it in his series "Du bist Maler" or in "Occupations" it is the role that needs to be constantly defined, debated and redefined in the course of time, taken into consideration the given socio-political conditions. Kiefer is critical of the role of representation in history. It sets double standards by serving political ideologies as, for example, the role of artist in the Nazi regime, analysed by Kiefer in his earlier works. By making references to the works of Joseph Thorak and Arno Brecker in his art books and

collages, he expresses obvious critique of representation, developing a strategy of resistance against the spectacularisation of historical events, the process in which painting and photography play an important part.

The attempt to redefine the role of an artist in contemporary, post-war society is evident in his oeuvre. Kiefer is an artist who not only represents the present and the past, but brings subversive, history-related, critical content into his work that focusses on the painful, the tragic and the repressed aspects of the collective memory: e.g. he undertakes actions like “Occupations”, breaking the taboo of bringing up the subject of Germany's Nazi past back in the 70-ies, refers to the motives from the esoteric teachings of the Kabbala relating them to the themes of the Holocaust.

Historical events are analysed with reference to mythology. Osiris and Isis, Siegfried and Brunnhilde, Margarethe and Sulamit - are some of the recurrent themes in his oeuvre that constitute a link from the mythological to the historical plane. Kiefer often emphasises analogies between mythological motives and historical events, he stresses the paradigmatic changes in our interpretation of myths in the course of time. The attempt to deconstruct myths in terms of their historical and socio-political value is characteristic for Kiefer's artistic practice. Painting, installation, architecture and literary references are the basic media to understand the relationship of mythological texts to various contexts: cultural, ideological, linguistic.

The element of subversive critique constituting a significant part of his work redefines our interpretation of mythology within historical perspective. Archaic motives, archetypes, prophecies are analysed in terms of their socio-political relevance. Kiefer's work, informed by a substantial portion of critique, refers not only to the past, but to our understanding of the present considering the heritage of the past, that consequently introduces the theme of the future. This accounts for the recurrent motive of prophecy and forecasting of the events to come in Kiefer's oeuvre: e.g. works related to Velimir Khlebnikov's numerological system to predict the future course of wars, divination practices with tarot cards or the biblical prophecies. The critical subtext contained in these prophecies and in the archaic lore is emphasised by artistic means, which makes Kiefer's art as relevant to the contemporary viewer as ever. Mythology is referred to as the eternal source allowing to explain the the

universal order of things, the cyclical nature of mythological time allows to foresee the future that appears to bear analogy to the past. If one knows mythology one can understand life.¹ Anselm Kiefer redefines the tradition of representing mythological images in his artistic practice. Epic heroes and protagonists from ancient myths are analysed within historical perspective with references to poetry and within philosophical discourse. Events from distant past are related to the present as if suggesting that contemporary world and ancient civilisations are universes apart, yet there's nothing in this world, past or future, that has not already been defined in mythology or referred to in art.

¹ Es genügt, den Mythos zu kennen, um das Leben zu verstehen, M. Eliade, *Die Religionen und das Heilige*, p. 456, cf. G. Van der Leeuw, *L'homme primitif et la religion*, Paris 1940, p. 120, 101

Bibliography

Primary Literature:

Evelyn Weiss and Dorothea V. Stetten, Anselm Kiefer, Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn 1977

Johannes Gachnang and Theo Kneubühler, Anselm Kiefer, Bilder und Bücher, Kunsthalle Bern 1978

Anselm Kiefer, Die Donauquelle, Michael Werner, Köln 1978

Rudi H. Fuchs, Anselm Kiefer, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven 1979

Carel Blotkamp and Günther Gercken, Anselm Kiefer, Groninger Museum, Groningen 1980

Klaus Gallwitz and Rudi H. Fuchs, Anselm Kiefer, Verbrennen, verholzen, versenken, versanden, German pavillion, XXXIX Biennale di Venezia, Venice 1980

Tilman Osterwold, Anselm Kiefer, Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart 1980

Rudi H. Fuchs, Anselm Kiefer, Mannheimer Kunstverein, Mannheim 1980

Zdenek Felix and Nicholas Serota, Anselm Kiefer, Museum Folkwang, Essen and Whitechappel Art Gallery, London 1981

Rudi H. Fuchs, Anselm Kiefer, Watercolours, 1970-1980, Kunstverein Freiburg, Freiburg 1981

Bazon Brock, "Unternehmen Seelöwe I" (1975), in Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk. Europäische Utopien seit 1800, Kunsthaus Zürich 1983

Katharina Schmidt (Hrsg.): Nothung. Anselm Kiefer, paintings and gouaches, exhibition dedicated to the award of the Hans-Thoma-Prize, 1983, Hans-Thoma Museum Bernau/Schwarzwald, Baden-Baden 1983

Anne Seymour, Anselm Kiefer, Watercolours, 1970-1982, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London 1983

René Denizot, Anselm Kiefer, Peintures de 1983-84, Musée d'Art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux 1984

Rudi H. Fuchs, Suzanne Pagé and Jürgen Harten, Anselm Kiefer, Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf and ARC/Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris 1984

Anselm Kiefer, Auszug aus Ägypten, Departure from Egypt, 1984-1985, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York 1985

Gudrun Inboden, Anselm Kiefer, Galerie Paul Maenz, Köln, Edited by Paul Maenz and Gerd de Vries, Walter König Verlag, Köln 1986

Armin Zweite, Anselm Kiefer, Biennale Sao Paolo 1987

Wiesław Borowski, Anselm Kiefer, Gallery Foksal, Warsaw 1987

Mark Rosenthal, Anselm Kiefer, The Art Institute of Chicago and Philadelphia Museum of Art, Prestel Verlag, Chicago 1987

Jürgen Harten, Susan Cragg Ricci, Theodore E. Stebbins, Ein Buch von Anselm Kiefer: Erotik im Fernen Osten oder: Transition from cool to warm, Stuttgart 1988

John Hallmark Neff, Anselm Kiefer Bruch und Einung, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York 1988

Armin Zweite, "Anselm Kiefer. Zweistromland," DuMont Buchverlag, Köln in cooperation with Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London 1989

Stanisław Chichowicz and Andrzej Pienkos, Anselm Kiefer, Foksal Gallery, Warsaw 1989

Magiciens de la Terre, (Editions du Centre Pompidou), Paris 1989

John Hutchinson, Anselm Kiefer. Jason, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, Editions Cantz, Stuttgart 1990

Klaus Gallwitz and Anselm Kiefer „Über Räume und Volker. Ein Gespräch mit Anselm Kiefer,“ Stadelches Kunstinstitut, Suhrkamp Verlag pocket-book, Frankfurt am Main 1990

Götz Adriani, Toni Stooss, Peter Schjeldahl, Zdenek Felix, Anselm Kiefer, Bücher, 1969-1990, Edition Cantz, Stuttgart 1990

Doreet LeVitté-Harten, Anselm Kiefer Lilith, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York 1990

Dieter Honisch, Doreet LeVitté-Harten, Wulf Herzogenrath, Angela Schneider, Anda Rottenberg, Peter-Klaus Schuster, Anselm Kiefer, National Gallery Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preußische Kulturbesitz, Berlin 1991

Jean-Noel Vuarnet, Anselm Kiefer, Nachtschattengewächse, Gallery Yvon Lambert, Paris 1991

Cordula Meier, Anselm Kiefer, Die Rückkehr des Mythos in der Kunst, Verlag Die Blaue Eule, Essen 1992

Daniel Arasse, Anselm Kiefer, Cette obscure clarté qui tombe des étoiles, Gallery Yvon Lambert, Paris 1996

Thomas McEvilly, Anselm Kiefer, I hold all Indias in my Hand, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London 1996

Nicola Spinoza, Lia Rumma, Anselm Kiefer, Holzschnitte, Electa, Naples 1997

Massimo Cacciari and Germano Celant, Anselm Kiefer, Himmel-Erde, Museo Correr Venice

1997

Mathew Biro, Anselm Kiefer and the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger, Cambridge University Press 1998

Robert Littman, Anselm Kiefer, Museum de Arte Moderna, Sao Paolo 1998

Kiefer, 20 ans de solitude, Editions du Regard, Paris 1998

Lisa Saltzman, Anselm Kiefer and Art after Auschwitz, Cambridge University Press 1999

Sabine Schütz, Anselm Kiefer, Geschichte als Material, Arbeiten 1969-1983, DuMont Buchverlag, Köln 1999

Nan Rosenthal, Anselm Kiefer, Works on Paper, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1999

Danilo Eccher, Anselm Kiefer, Stelle cadenti, Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna 1999

Bernard Comment, Die Frauen der Antike, Galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris 1999

Thomas Karin, Anselm Kiefer in Gesammelte Räume - gesammelte Träume, Kunst aus Deutschland von 1960 bis 2000, exhibition catalogue Martin-Gropius Bau, Berlin 1999

Heiner Bastian, Dein und mein Alter und das Alter der Welt, Gagosian Gallery, New York, Schirmer Mosel, Munich 2000

Catherine Strasser, Anselm Kiefer, Chevirat ha-Kelim, Chapelle de la Salpêtrière, Paris, Editions du Regard, Paris 2000

Thomas McEvelley, Anselm Kiefer, Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London 2000

Heiner Bastian, Anselm Kiefer, Über eure Städten wird Gras wachsen, Schirmer Mosel,

München 2000

Anselm Kiefer. Les Reines de France, Le Rectangle, Lyon 2001

Steingrim Laursen, Thomas McEvilly, Anselm Kiefer, Paintings, 1998-2001, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark 2001

Cristoph Ransmayr, Die Sieben Himmelspaläste, Fondation Beyeler, Bâle 2001

Daniel Arasse, Anselm Kiefer, Schirmer/Mosel, München 2001

Anselm Kiefer, Kukje Gallery, Korea 2001

Harold Bloom, Merkaba, Gagosian Gallery, New York 2002

Klaus Gallwitz, Anselm Kiefer, The Heavenly Palaces: Merkabah, Harvard University Art Museums 2003

Thomas H. Macho, Wieland Schmied, Anselm Kiefer, Am Anfang, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Salzburg 2003

Elektra Teatro di San Carlo, Naples 2003

Eduardo Cycelin, Mario Codognato, Anselm Kiefer, Museo Archeologico, Naples 2004

Paul Ardenne, Anselm Kiefer, I sette Palazzi Celeste, Milan 2004

Werner Spies, Anselm Kiefer – Laßt tausend Blumen Blühen, Kunsthalle Würth 2004

Philippe Dagen, Anselm Kiefer, Die Frauen, Villa Médicis, Rome 2005

Kevin Power, Anselm Kiefer, Für Chlebnikov, White Cube 2005

Götz Adriani, Anselm Kiefer. Für Paul Celan, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Salzburg 2005

Michael Auping, Anselm Kiefer. Heaven and Earth, Prestel 2005

Anselm Kiefer, Velimir Khlebnikov, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield 2006

Graham Howes, Anthony Bond, Norman Rosenthal, Anselm Kiefer, Aperiatur Terra, White Cube, Londres 2007

Paul Ardenne, Pierre Assouline, Anselm Kiefer, Sternenfall, Editions du Redard 2007

Sternenfall, Anselm Kiefer au Grand Palais, with texts by Danièle Cohn, Anselm Kiefer, Andrea Lauterwein, José Alvarez, Editions du Regard 2007

Philippe Dagen, Anselm Kiefer, Sternenfall, Editions du Regard, CNAP, Paris 2007

Andrea Lauterwein, Anselm Kiefer Paul Celan, Myth, Mourning and Memory, Thames & Hudson Ltd, London 2007

Anselm Kiefer, Heroic Symbols, Hrsgb. Heiner Bastian, with text by Heiner Bastian, Schirmer/Mosel Verlag, München, published on the occasion of the exhibition Anselm Kiefer, Heroische Sinnbilder, 2 May - 13 September, 2008

Secondary Literature:

Giorgio Agamben, Die kommende Gemeinschaft, (La comunità che viene) Bollati Boringheri, Turin 2001

Roland Barthes, Kritik und Wahrheit, Edition Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1967

Walter Benjamin, Hartmut Böhme, Yvonne Ehrenspeck Hrsg., Aura und Reflexion: Schriften

zur Ästhetik und Kunstphilosophie, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 2007

Walter Benjamin, Rolf Tiedemann Hrsg., Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner Technischen Reproduzierbarkeit, Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. 1, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1974

Walter Benjamin, Rolf Tiedemann Hrsg., Über den Begriff der Geschichte, Gesammelte Schriften, Bd. I, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1974

Walter Benjamin, Ausw. und Nachw. von Deltev Schottker, Medienästhetische Schriften, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp 2002

Harold Bloom, Kabbala: Poesie und Kritik, New York 1975

Harold Bloom, Anselm Kiefer, Merkaba, Gagosian Gallery, New York 2002

Horst Bredekamp, Birgit Schneider, Vera Dünkel (Hg.) Das Technische Bild, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2008

Theo Buck, Bildersprache, Celan-Motive bei Lazlo Lakner und Anselm Kiefer, Rimbaud, Aachen 1993

Theo Buck, Muttersprache-Mördersprache, Celan Studien I, Rimbaud, Aachen 1993

Paul Celan, Ausgewählte Gedichte, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968

Klaus Peter Dencker (Hg.), Interface, Verlag Hans-Bredow-Institut, Hamburg 1992

Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1995

Vilém Flusser, Towards a Philosophy of Photography, Printed in West Germany, 1983

Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin h. d. Buchloh, Art since 1900, Tames & Hudson, London 2004

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of Human Sciences*, Routledge, London 2007

Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. by John O'Brian, Vol. 4, *The University of Chicago Press*, 1939-1944, 1988

Clement Greenberg, Hrsg. Von Karlheinz Lüdeking, *Die Essenz der Moderne, Ausgewählte Essays und Kritiken*, Verlag der Kunst, Dresden 1997

Clement Greenberg, ed. by John O'Brian, *Modernist Painting*, 1960

Boris Groys, *Kunst-Kommentare*, Passagen Verlag, Wien 1997

Boris Groys, *Topologie der Kunst*, Edition Akzente, Carl Hanser Verlag, München, Wien 2003

Boris Groys, *Unter Verdacht, Eine Phänomenologie der Medien*, Carl Hanser Verlag, München Wien 2000

Erik Hornung, *Tal der Könige*, 5. Auflage, Artemis Verlag Zürich und München, 1990

Helios und Sol, *Kulte und Ikonographie des griechischen und römischen Sonnengottes*, Petra Matern, Istanbul Ege, Yayinlari, 2002

Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media The Extensions of Man*, Routledge, London, 1964

Meyers Großes Universallexikon, Bibliographisches Institut Mannheim/Wien/Zürich, Meyers Lexikonverlag, 1983

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, Reclam, Stuttgart 1991

Alexander Roob, Alchemie und Mystik, Das Hermetische Museum, Taschen Verlag, Köln 1996

Peter Schmitt, Owen Hopkins, Burlington House a Brief History, Tradewinds Ltd.

Gershom Scholem, Zur Kabbala und ihrer Symbolik, 3. Aufl., Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1981

Gershom Scholem, Von der Mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit - Studien zu Grundbegriffen der Kabbala, 1. Aufl. 4. Nachdr. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1995

Gershom Scholem, Ursprung und Anfänge der Kabbala, De Gruyter, Berlin 1962

Leo Steinberg, Other Criteria. Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art, Oxford University Press, New York 1972

Rudolf Steiner, Das Christentum als mystische Tatsache und die Mysterien des Altertums, Fischer, Frankfurt am Main 1985

Robert R. Taylor, The Word in Stone The Role of Architecture in the National Socialist Ideology, University of California Press Berkley, Los Angeles, London 1974

Elliot R. Wolfson, Through a Speculum that Shines, Princeton University Press, 1997, Princeton, New Jersey

Slavoj Žižek, Die Pest Der Phantasmen, Passagen Verlag, Wien 1997

List of Illustrations

Pic. 1. Die Tur (The Door), 1973, 300 x 220 cm, charcoal, oil, hare-skin on burlap, seamed together vertically, private collection

Pic. 2. Wege der Weltweisheit: Hermannsschlacht (Ways of Worldly Wisdom: Arminius's Battle), 1978, 300 x 300 cm, woodcut made up of 31 parts glued together, blotting and hand-made paper over-painted with acrylic and shellac with inscription "Wege der Weltweisheit: die Hermannsschlacht," Collection Doris and Charles Saatchi, London

Pic. 3. Notung, 1973, 300 x 432 cm, charcoal, oil, charcoal drawing of sword on cardboard collaged onto burlap, in the upper side in the middle inscription "Ein Schwert verhiess mir der Vater; on the right over the sword inscribed: "Notung!" Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam)

Pic. 4. Die Frauen der Revolution (Women of the Revolution), 1991, 240 x 400 cm, private collection

Pic. 5. Melancholia, 1988, 170 x 230 cm, ash on photography on lead in glassed steel frame, Hara Museum of Art, Japan

Pic. 6. Piet Mondrian - Arminius's Battle, 1976, 254 x 112,5 cm, oil on canvas, inscription below on the right side: "Piet Mondrian - Hermannsschlacht," Collection Geert Jan Visser, Belgium

Pic. 7. Iconoclastic Controversy, 1976-1977, 325 x 330 cm, oil on canvas, with inscriptions: "Theophilos, Photios, Johannes v. Damaskos, Theodos Studites, Leo III, Artavasdos, Theoktistos, Theodora, Staurakios, Theodoros Melissenos," Collection Doris and Charles Saatchi, London

Pic. 8. Osiris, 1985-1991, 170 x 240 cm, photography on lead in glassed steel frame, National Gallery, Berlin

Pic. 9. Seven Heavenly Palaces, 1991, 170 x 240 cm, photo on lead in glassed steel frame, Collection Michel Roche, Paris

Pic. 10. Jerusalem, 1984-1986, 380 x 560 cm, acrylic, emulsion, shellac, lead, ion and gold leaf on canvas, in two parts, with steal and lead, Collection of Susan and Lewis Manilow, Chicago

Pic. 11. Maikäfer flieg! 1974, 220 x 300 cm, oil on burlap, inscription up on the left: "Maikäfer flieg! der Vater ist im Krieg, die Mutter ist in Pommerland, Pommerland ist abgebrannt;" Collection Doris and Charles Saatchi, London

Pic. 12. Malen (To Paint), 118 x 254 cm, oil, shellac on burlap, inscription vertically in the middle "malen" (to paint) and below on the right: "for Julia," Collection family H. de Groot, Groningen

Pic. 13. Landscape with Head, 1975, 210 x 240 cm, charcoal and oil on burlap; over-painted with black distemper on the right side, on the left a charcoal drawing glued with pattex; burlap seamed together horizontally, the right edge unevenly cut off, private collection

Pic. 14. Nuremberg, 1982, 280 x 380 cm, acrylic, emulsion and straw on canvas, Collection Eli and Edythe L. Broad, Los Angeles

Pic. 15. Margarethe, 1981, 280 x 380 cm, oil, acrylic, emulsion and straw on canvas, private collection

Pic. 16. Margarethe - Sulamith, 1981, 42 x 55, 8 cm, watercolour on paper, Anthony d'Offay, London

Pic. 17. Resurrexit, 1973, 290 x 180 cm, charcoal, acrylic, on burlap, upper trapezia part glued with pattex, lower part seamed vertically, up in the middle inscribed "resurrexit," Collection Sanders, Amsterdam

Pic. 18. Himmel-Erde (Heaven - Earth), 1974, 70 x 195 cm, oil on canvas, private collection

Pic. 18. a. Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen (Cauterisation of the Rural District of Buchen) 1974, book with bounded original photographs, iron oxyd and flax oil on wood-chip paper, 62 x 45 x3 cm, 210 pages, pp. 10-11

Pic. 19. Malerei der Verbrannten Erde, /Painting of the Scorched Earth/, 1974, 95 x 125 cm, oil on burlap, private collection

Pic. 19. a. Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen (Cauterisation of the Rural District of Buchen) 1974, pages 134-135

Pic. 20. Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen (Cauterisation of the Rural District of Buchen) 1974, pp. 150-151

Pic. 21. Alaric's Grave, 1975, 220 x 330 cm, distemper on burlap, horizontally seamed on two pats, New Gallery of Aachen - Collection Ludwig

Pic. 22. Grave of the Unknown Painter, 1974, 115 x 161 cm, oil, emulsion, synthetic resin, felt-tip pen, inscription: "Grab des unbekannten Malers," private collection

Pic. 23. Operation Hagenbewegung, 1975, 130 x 150 cm, oil on burlap, up on the right inscription: "Unternehmen Hagenbewegung," private collection

Pic. 24. Couronne Noir (Black Crown), 2005, 190 x 330 cm, oil, emulsion, acrylic, pencil, dried branches, metal on canvas

Pic. 25. Märkische Heide (March Heath), 1974, 118 x 254 cm, oil, acrylic, shellac on burlap, below inscription: "Märkische Heide," Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven

Pic 25. a. Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen (Cauterisation of the Rural District of Buchen)

Pic. 26. Wach im Zigeunerlager und wach im Wüstenzelt. Es rinnt uns der Sand aus den

Haaren, 1997, 280 x 560 cm, acrylic, shellac, burnt clay, iron on canvas, private collection

Pic. 27. Des Malers Schutzengel (Painter's Guardian Angel), 1975, oil on canvas, 130 x 150, 5 cm, Collection A. and G. Gercken, Hamburg

Pic. 28. Regina im caelum assumpta, 1977-2008, oil, emulsion, acrylic, shellac on canvas, 380 x 330 cm

Pic. 29. Das Wölund Lied (Wayland's Song), 1982, 280 x 380 cm, oil, emulsion, straw, photo on projection paper on canvas, with applied lead wings with stripes, up right inscribed "Das Wölund-Lied," Collection Doris and Charles Saatchi, London

Pic. 30. Voyage au bout de la nuit (Voyage to the End of Night), 2006, mixed media, each painting 190 x 330 cm, composition of 30 paintings

Pic. 31. Velimir Khlebnikov, 2004, mixed media, each painting 190 x 330 cm, composition of 30 paintings

Pic. 32. Lilith at the Red Sea, 1990, 280 x 625 cm, lead, emulsion, dresses and ash on canvas, up in the middle inscription "Lilith am Roten Meer", Collection Erich Marx, Berlin

Pic. 33. Merkawa, 1996, Book, 32 pages, mixed media, 104.5, 81.9 x 9.8 cm, bound volume

Pic. 34. Das Lied von der Zeder - für Paul Celan (The Song of Cedar - for Paul Celan), 2005, acrylic, charcoal, branches on photograph on cardboard, 40 pages, 64 x 44 x 4 cm

Pic. 35. a. Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen (Cauterisation of the Rural District of Buchen) 1974, pages 156-157

Pic. 35. b. Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen (Cauterisation of the Rural District of Buchen), 1974, pages 4-5

Pic. 36. Piet Mondrian, "Operation Sea-Lion," 1975, original photographs on cardboard, 57

x 42 x 12 cm, 70 pages

Pic. 37. March Sand IV, 1976, flax oil and sand, on bound original photographs and wood-chip paper, cardboard bound with original photographs, 60 x 42,5 x 5 cm, 48 pages

Pic. 38. Sulamith 1990, soldered lead, woman hair, ash, 101 x 63 x 11 cm, 64 pages

Pic. 39. Lilith's Daughters, 1990, 102 x 76 x 18 cm, 62 pages, acrylic, emulsion and ash on original photos on cardboard with lead strips and ash dresses, private collection

Pic. 40. Isis and Osiris, 1987, clay and mud on original photographs over cardboard with copper cords and ceramic splinters, 72 x 55 x 8 cm, 36 pages, private collection

Pic. 41. Bilderstreit (Iconoclastic Controversy II), 1980, shellac on original photographs, on cardboard, 58 x 43 x 8 cm, 42 pages

Pic. 42. Du bist Maler (You are painter), 1969, ink, original photographs, illustrated photos on paper, 25x19x1cm, 220 pages, private collection

Pic. 43. Heroische Sinnbilder (Heroic Symbols), 1969, watercolour on paper, graphite, original photographs, illustrated photographs, postcards, and canvas strips on cardboard, 66 x 50 x 8.5 cm, 46 pages, private collection

Pic. 44. Kyffhäuser, 1980, acrylic, emulsion and shellac over original photographs on cardboard, 60 x 42 x 8 cm, 48 pages, Collection Francesco Clemente, New York

Pic. 45. Das Deutsche Volksgesicht, Kohle für 2000 Jahre (The German National Face, Coals for 2000 Years), 1974, bounded original photos, emulsion and charcoal, iron oxide and linseed oil on wood-chip paper, 57 x 45 x 6 cm, 182 pages, private collection

Pic. 46. Paul Celan - Jakobs Himmlisches Blut Benedeiet von Äxten (Paul Celan - Jacob's Heavenly Blood Blessed by Axes), 2005, acrylic, charcoal, branches, lead, string on photography on cardboard

Pic. 47. Espenbaum – für Paul Celan (Aspen Tree – for Paul Celan), 2005, oil, emulsion, acrylic, charcoal, plaster, resin, hair, lead string, branches on canvas, 190 x 280 cm

Pic. 48. Die Sefiroth, 1996, 330 x 180 cm, emulsion, acrylic, charcoal, shellac on canvas, private collection

Pic. 49. Die Entfaltung der Sefiroth (The Unfolding of Sefirot), 1985- 1988, 340 x 690 cm, oil, acrylic, emulsion, soil and ash on canvas with lead, roof gutters, photo fragments

Pic. 50. Zim-Zum, 1990, 380 x 560 cm, oil, emulsion, shellac, crayon, ash on canvas on lead, National Gallery, Washington

Pic. 51. Himmelsleiter (Heavenly Stair) 2002, 380 x 280 cm, oil, emulsion, acrylic, wire cages, metal shelves, glass on canvas

Pic. 52. Sefer Hechalot, 2002, 112 x 88 cm, painted photograph

Pic. 53. Jericho, towers installed in the Royal Academy courtyard, London, 2007

Pic. 54. Innenraum (Interior), 1981, 287 x 311 cm, oil, acrylic, shellac, emulsion on canvas, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam

Pic. 55. To the Supreme Being, 1983, 278 x 368 oil, acrylic, emulsion, shellac, straw and fragments of woodcuts on canvas, Musée national d'art moderne, Paris

Pic. 56. Sulamith, 1983, 290 x 370 cm, emulsion, oil, acrylic, aquatex, shellac, straw, woodcut on canvas, inscription up left: "Sulamith," private collection

Pic. 57. Sonnenschiff (Sun Ship), 2007, Barjac

Pic. 58. Palmsonntag (Palm Sunday), palm branches, plaster, clay, charcoal, emulsion, installation at White Cube Gallery, London, 2007

Pic. 59. Geheimnis der Farne, (Mystery of the Ferns), 2006, 190 x 140 cm, clay, branches, emulsion under glass, below in the middle inscription: "Nachtschatten"

Pic. 60. Zweistromland - the High Priestess, 1985-1989, 500 x 800 x 100 cm, about 200 books of lead, on steel shelves, with glass and copper cords

Pic. 61. Zweistromland - The High Priestess, book # 24, 1985-1989

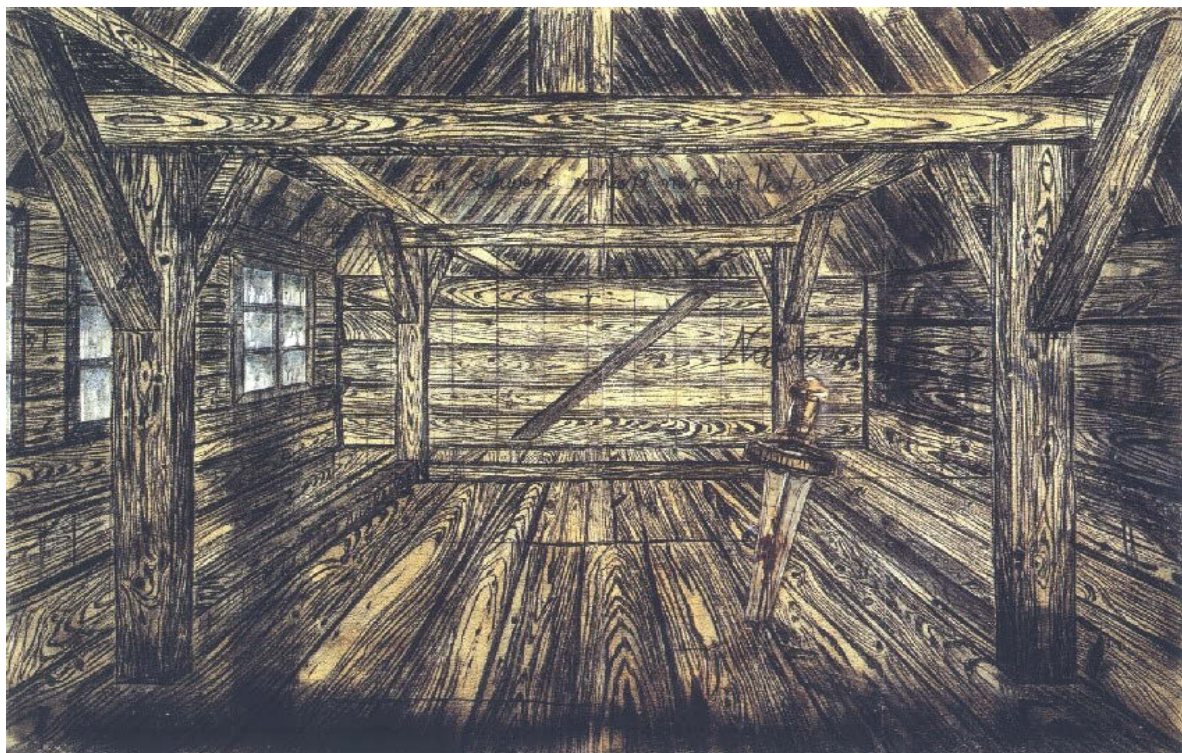
Pic. 62. Chute d'étoiles (Star Fall), 1998, 465 x 530 cm, emulsion, acrylic, shellac on canvas, with splinters of glass



Pic. 1. The Door, 1973, 300 x 220 cm



Pic. 2. Wege der Weltweisheit: die Hermanns Schlacht (Ways of Worldly Wisdom: Arminius's Battle) 1978, 300 x 300 cm



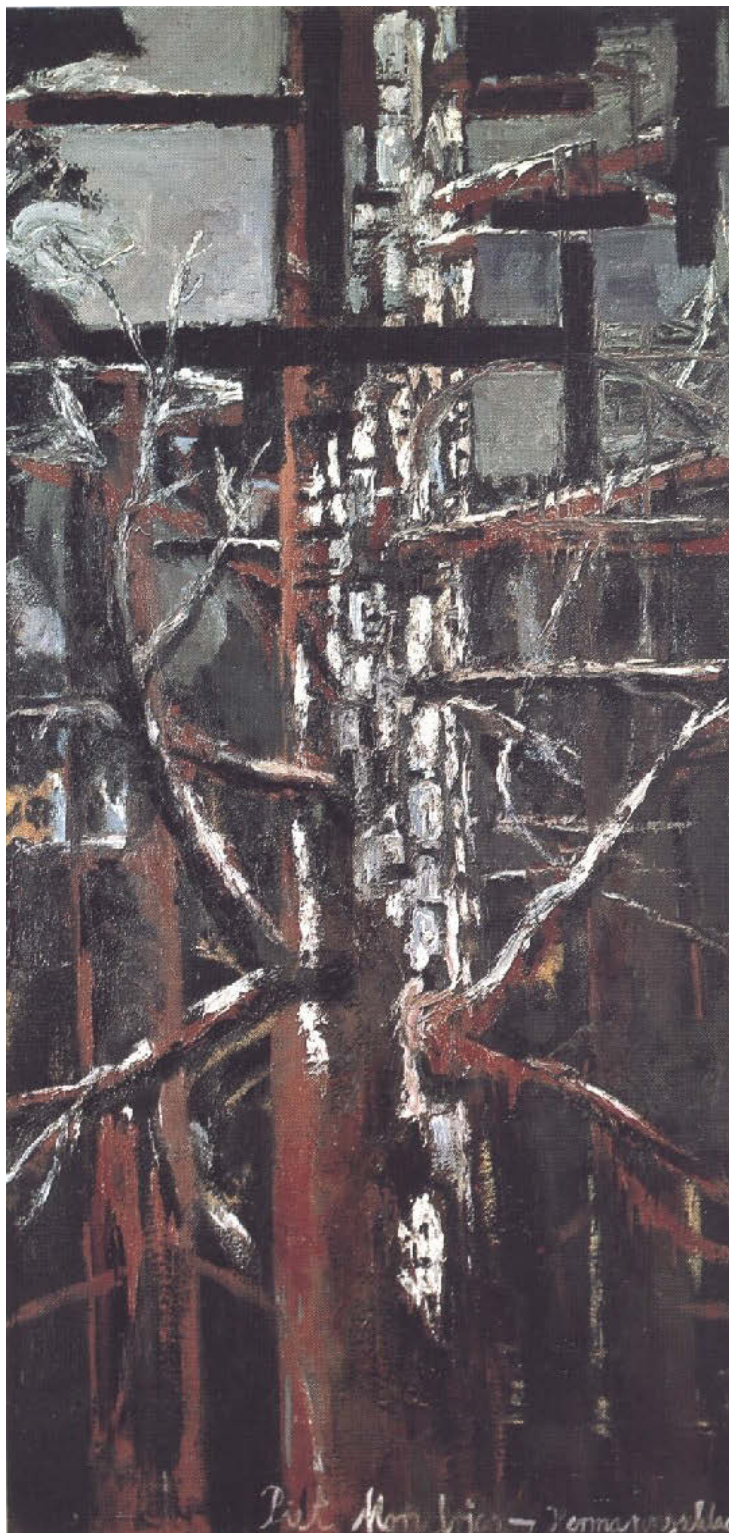
Pic. 3. Notung, 1973, 300 x 432 cm



Pic. 4. Die Frauen der Revolution (Women of the Revolution), 1991, 240 x 400 cm



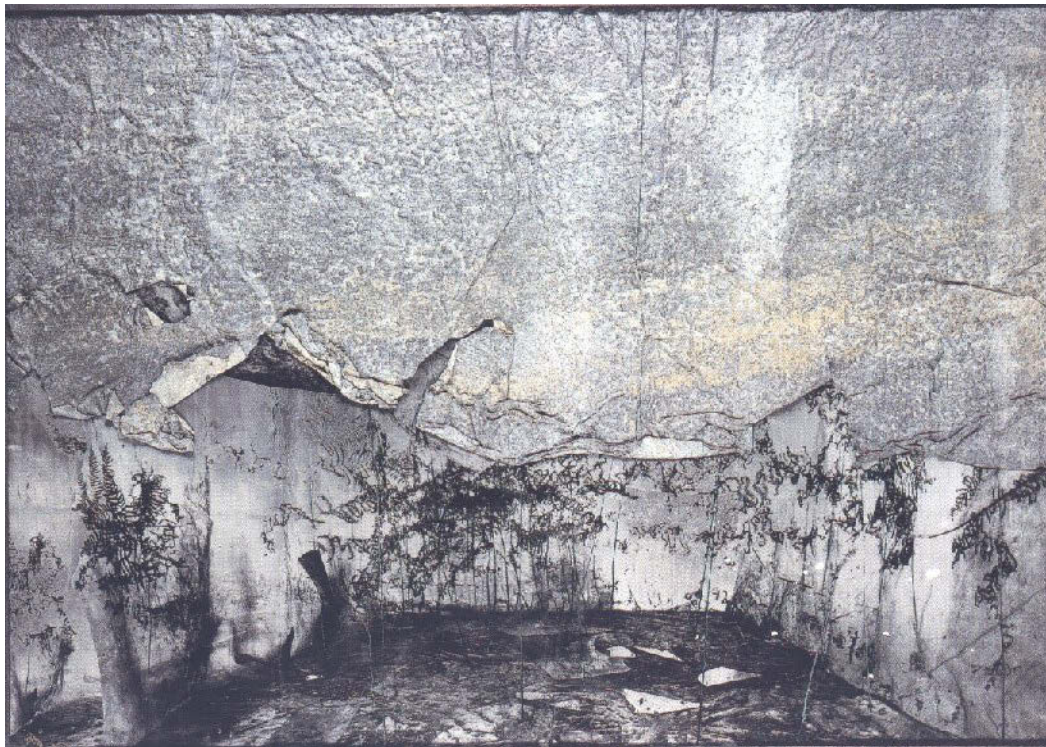
Pic. 5. Melancholia, 1988, 170 x 230 cm



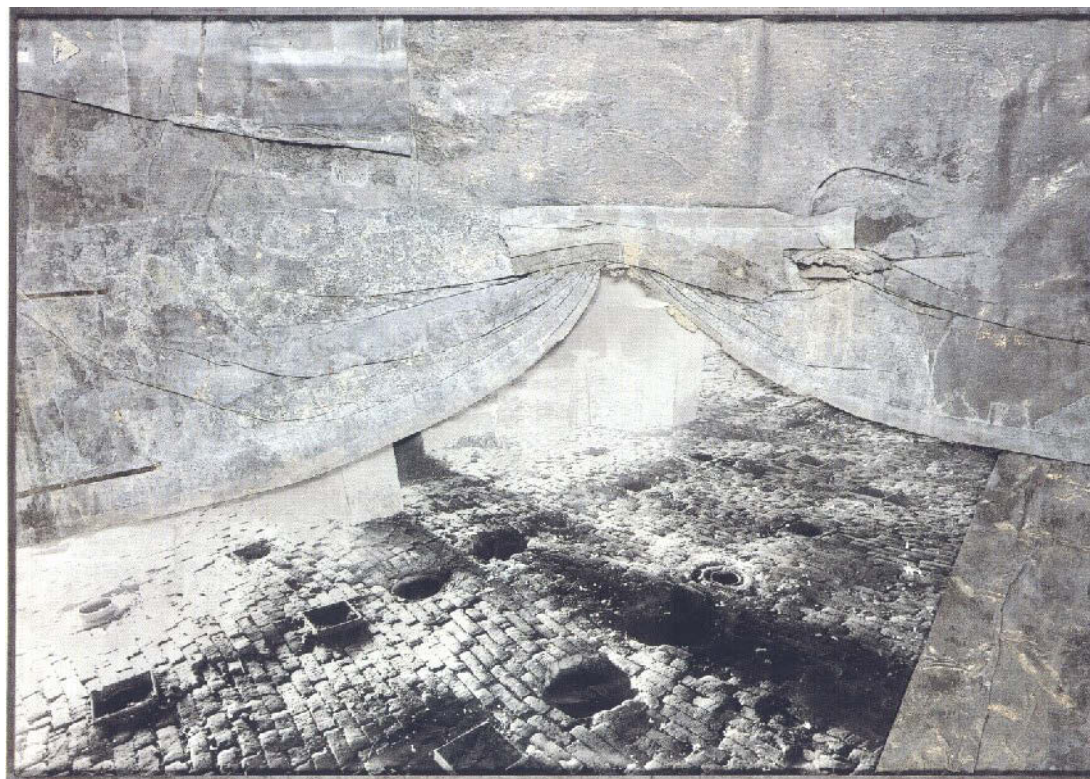
Pic. 6. Piet Mondrian - Arminius's Battle, 1976, 254 x 112,5 cm



Pic. 7. Iconoclastic Controversy, 1980, 290 x 400 cm



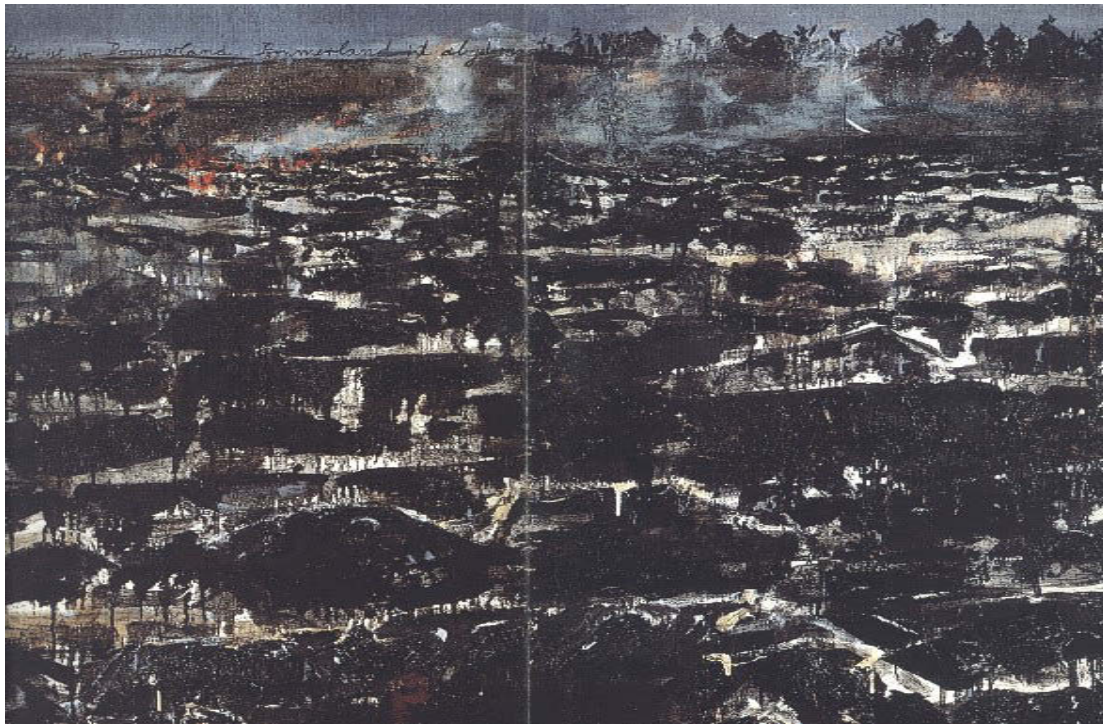
Pic. 8. Osiris, 1985-1991, 170 x 240 cm



Pic. 9. Sieben Himmelspaläste (Seven Heavenly Palaces), 1991, 170 x 240 cm



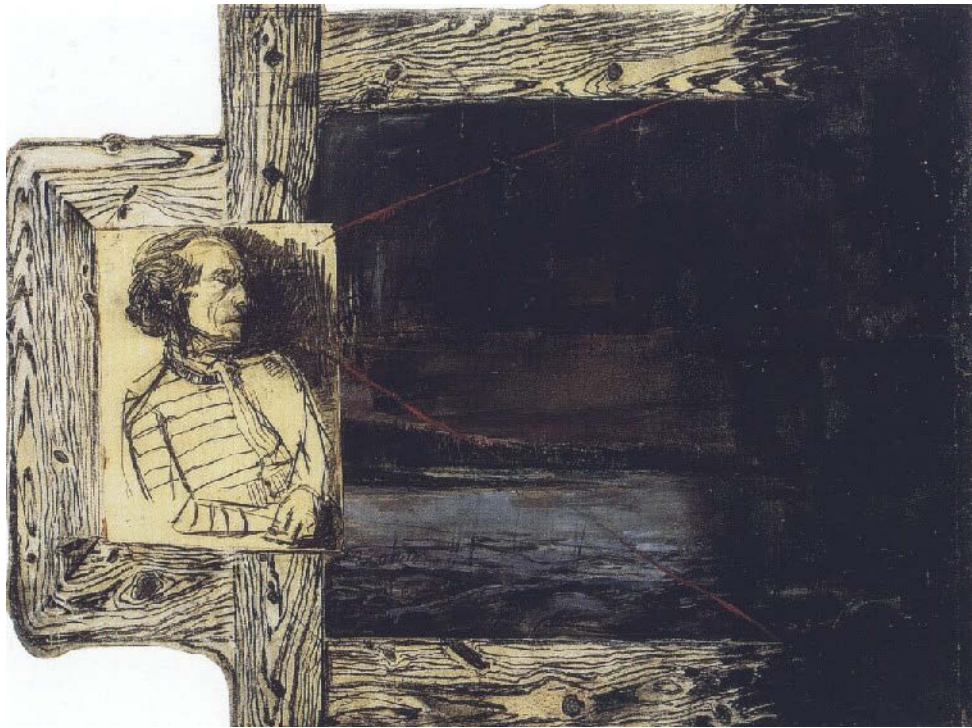
Pic. 10. Jerusalem, 1984-1986, 380 x 560 cm



Pic. 11. Maikäfer flieg! 1974, 220 x 300



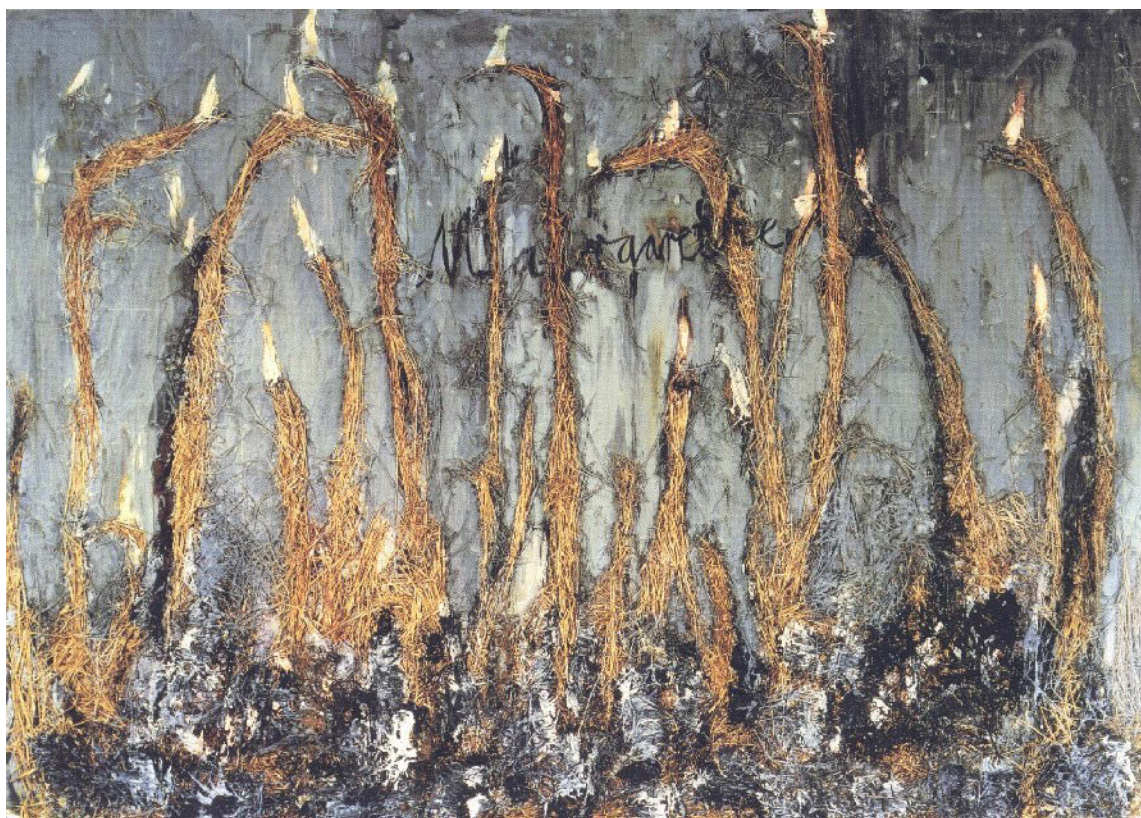
Pic. 12. Malen (To Paint), 118 x 254 cm



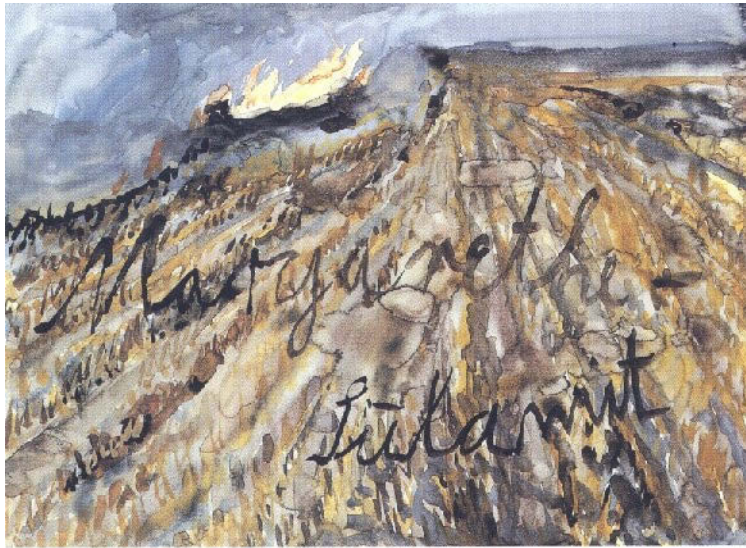
Pic. 13. Landscape with Head, 1975, 210 x 240 cm



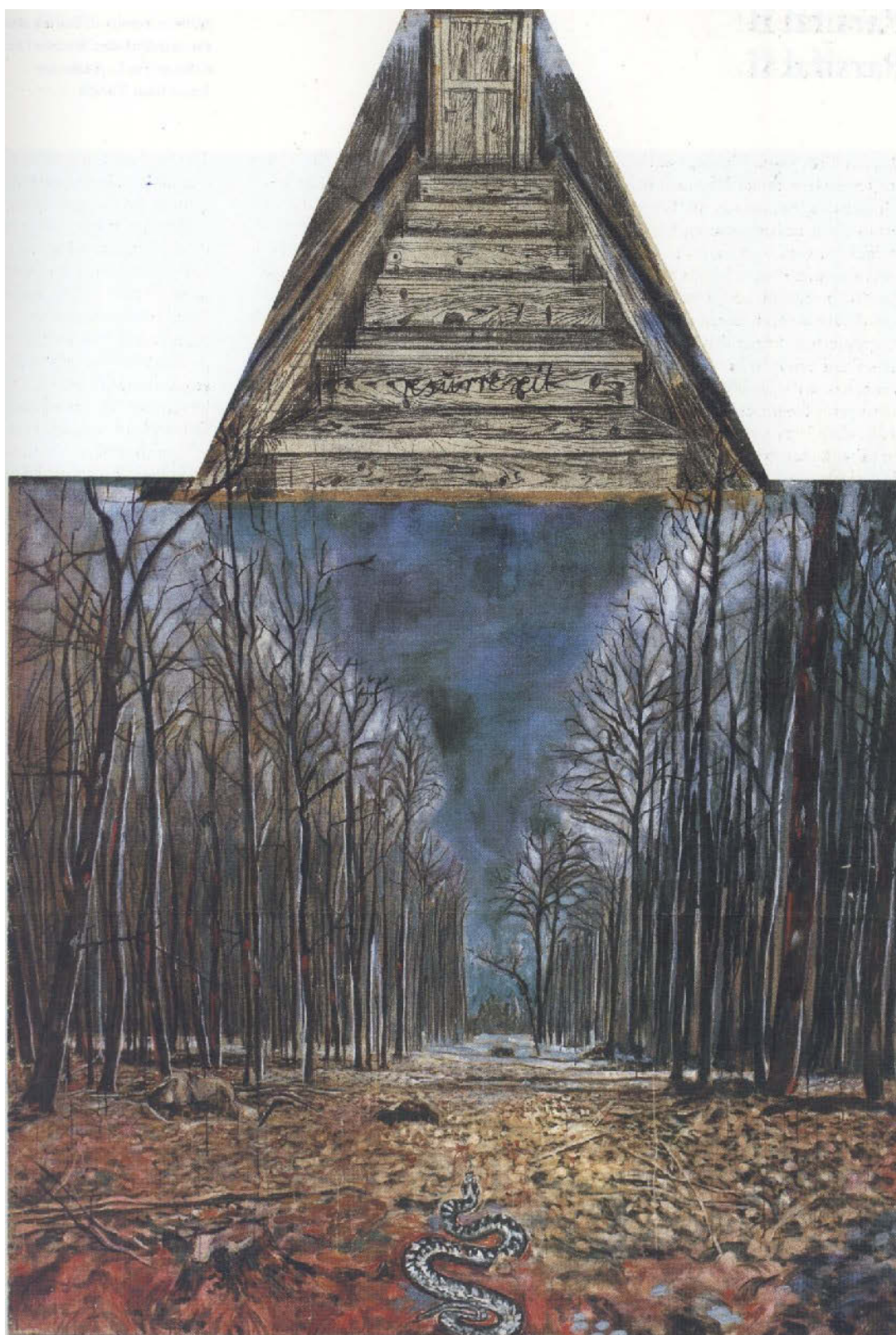
Pic. 14. Nürnberg, 1982, 280 x 380 cm



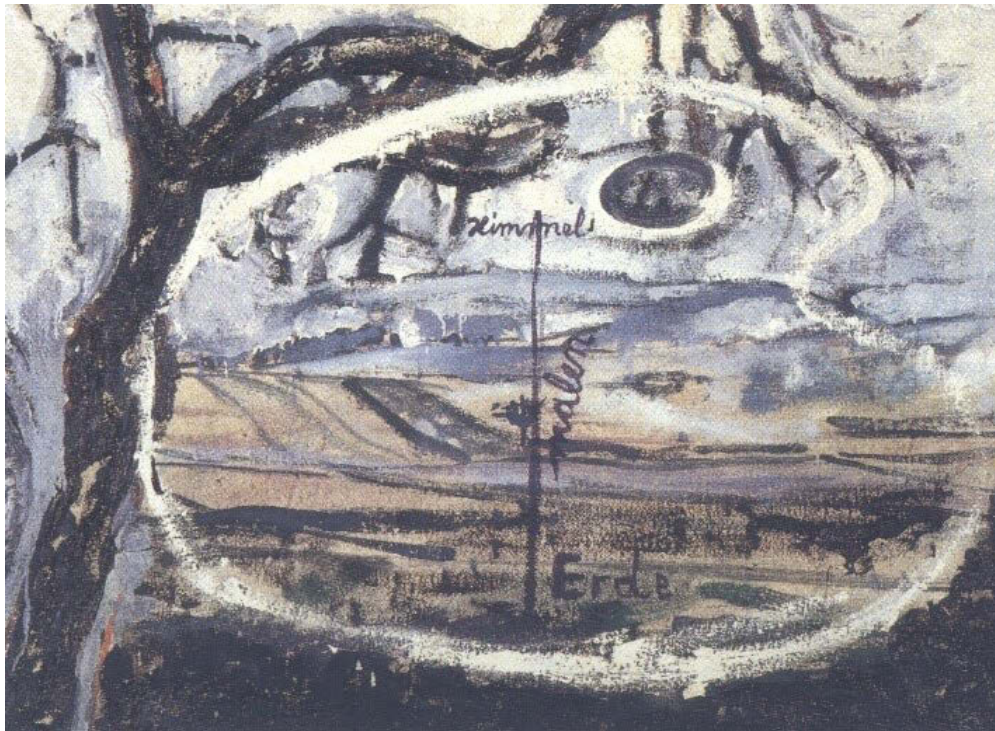
Pic. 15. Margarethe, 1981, 280 x 380 cm



Pic. 16. Margarethe - Sulamith, 1981, 42 x 55, 8 cm



Pic. 17. Resurrexit, 1973, 290 x 180 cm



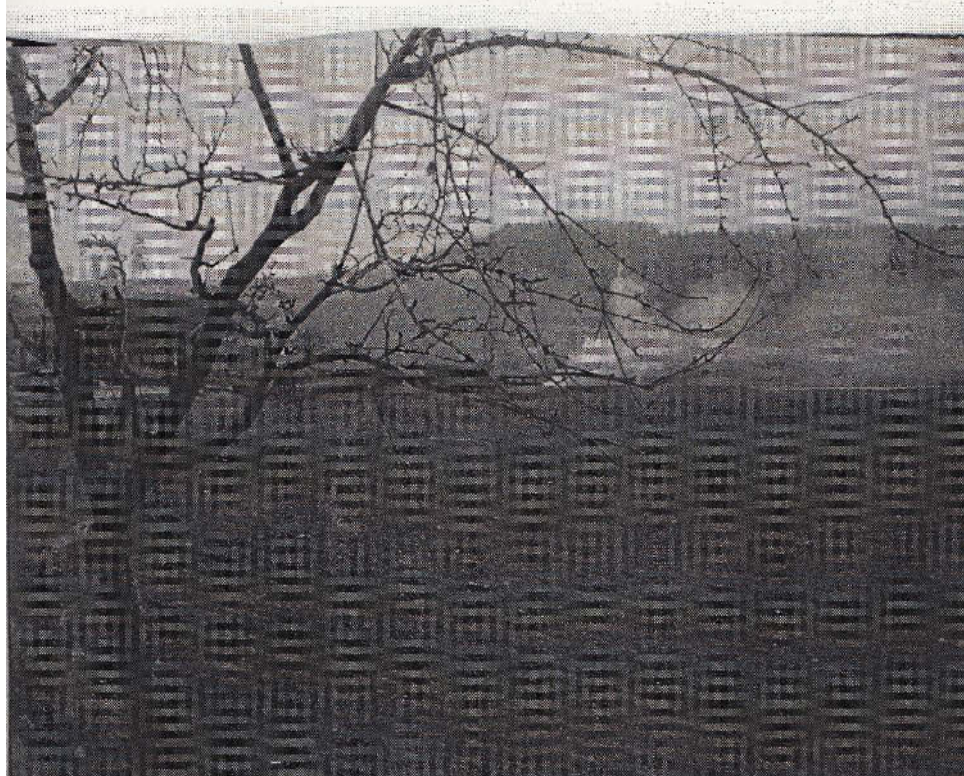
Pic. 18. Himmel-Erde (Heaven – Earth), 1974, 70 x 195 cm



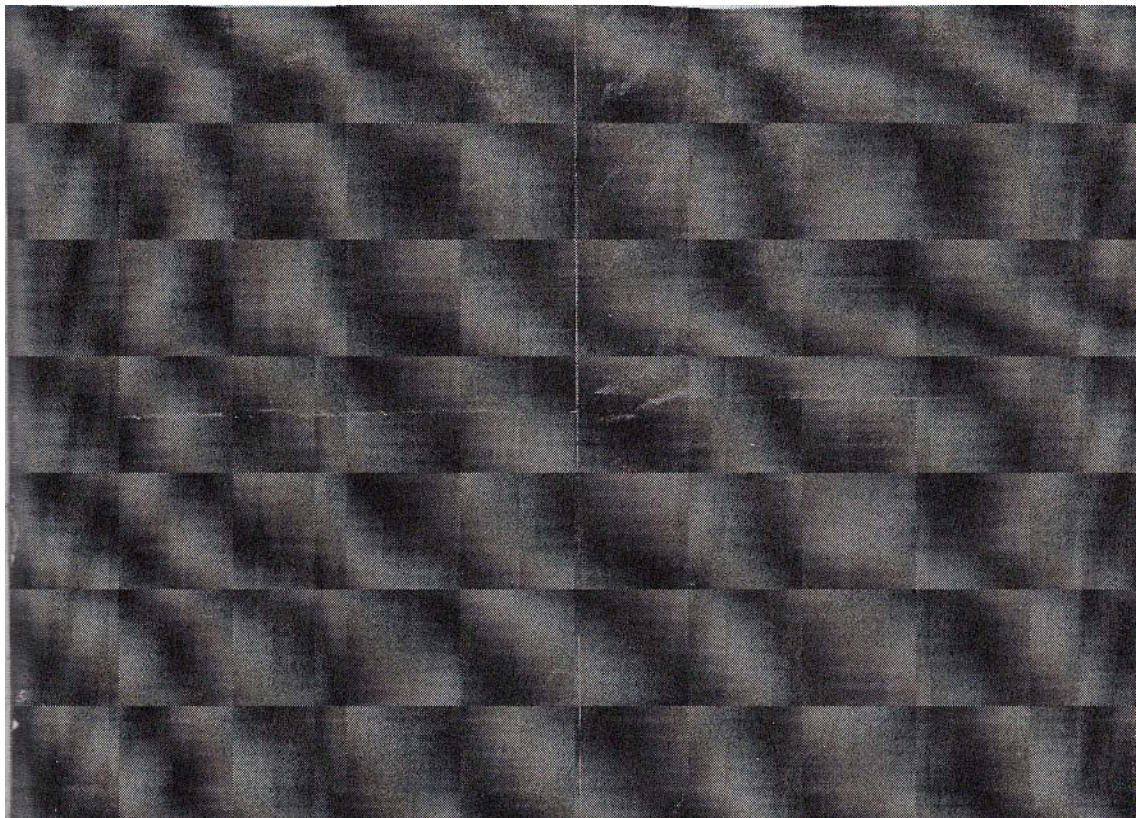
Pic. 19. Malerei der Verbrannten Erde, (Painting of the Scorched Earth), 1974, 95 x 125 cm



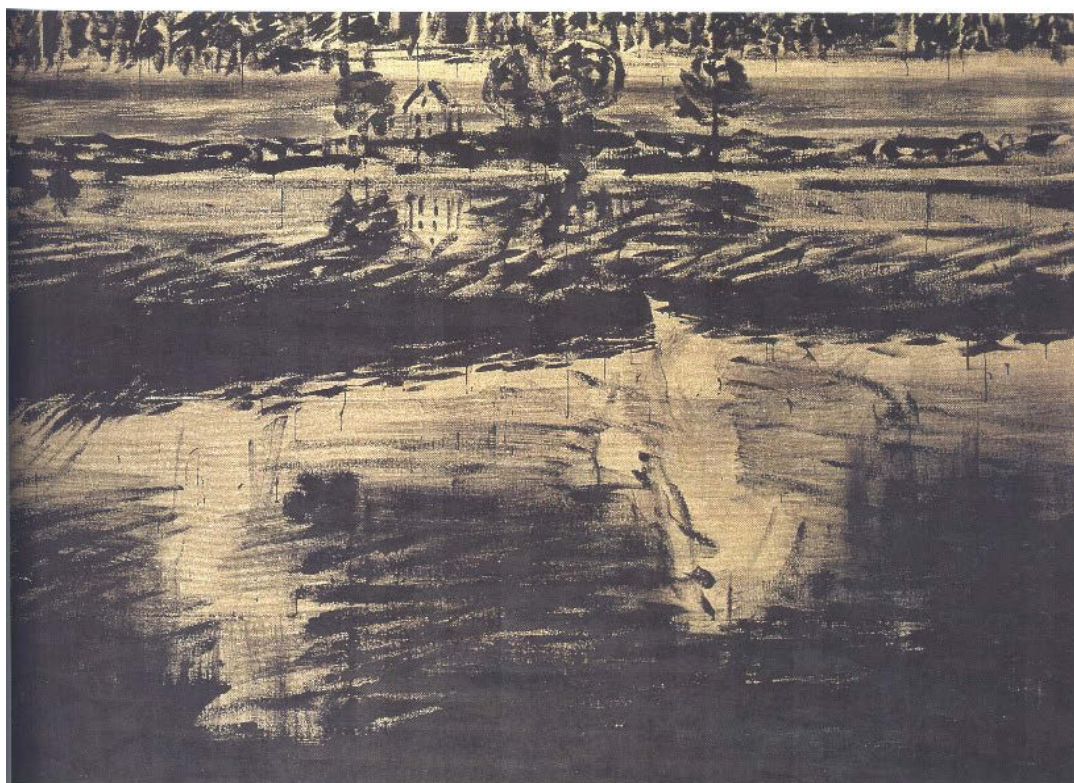
18. a. *Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen* (Cauterisation of the District of Buchen, pages 10-11)



Pic. 18a/19 a. Cauterisation of the District of



Pic. 20. Cauterisation of the District of Buchen



Pic. 21. Alarics Grab (Alaric's Grave), 1975, 220 x 330 cm



Pic. 22. Grab des Unbekannten Malers (Grave of the Unknown Painter), 1974, 115 x 161 cm



Pic. 23. Operation Hagenbewegung, 1975, 130 x 150 cm



Pic. 24. Couronne Noir, 2005, 190 x 330 cm



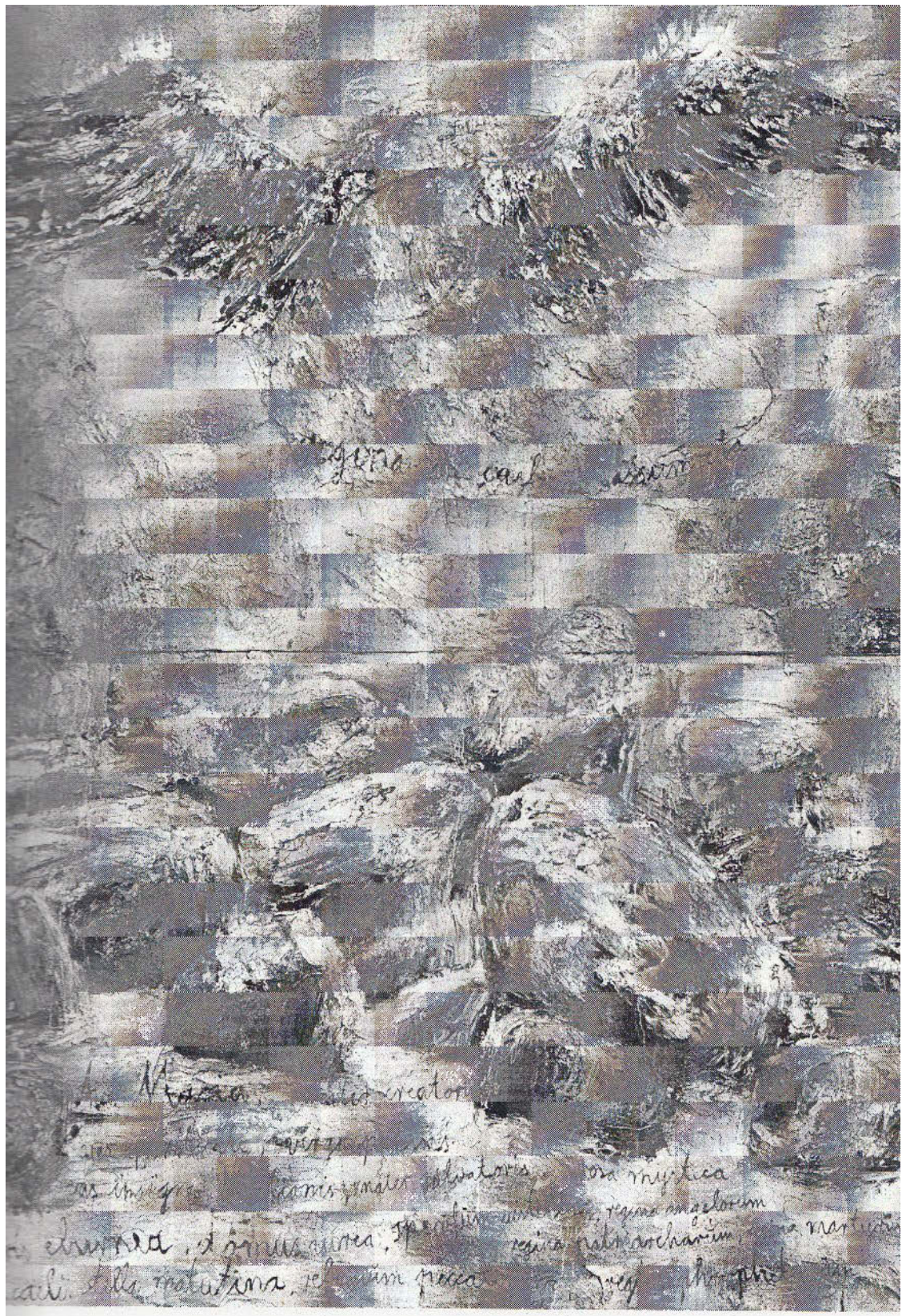
Pic. 25. Märkische Heide (March Heath), 1974, 118 x 254 cm



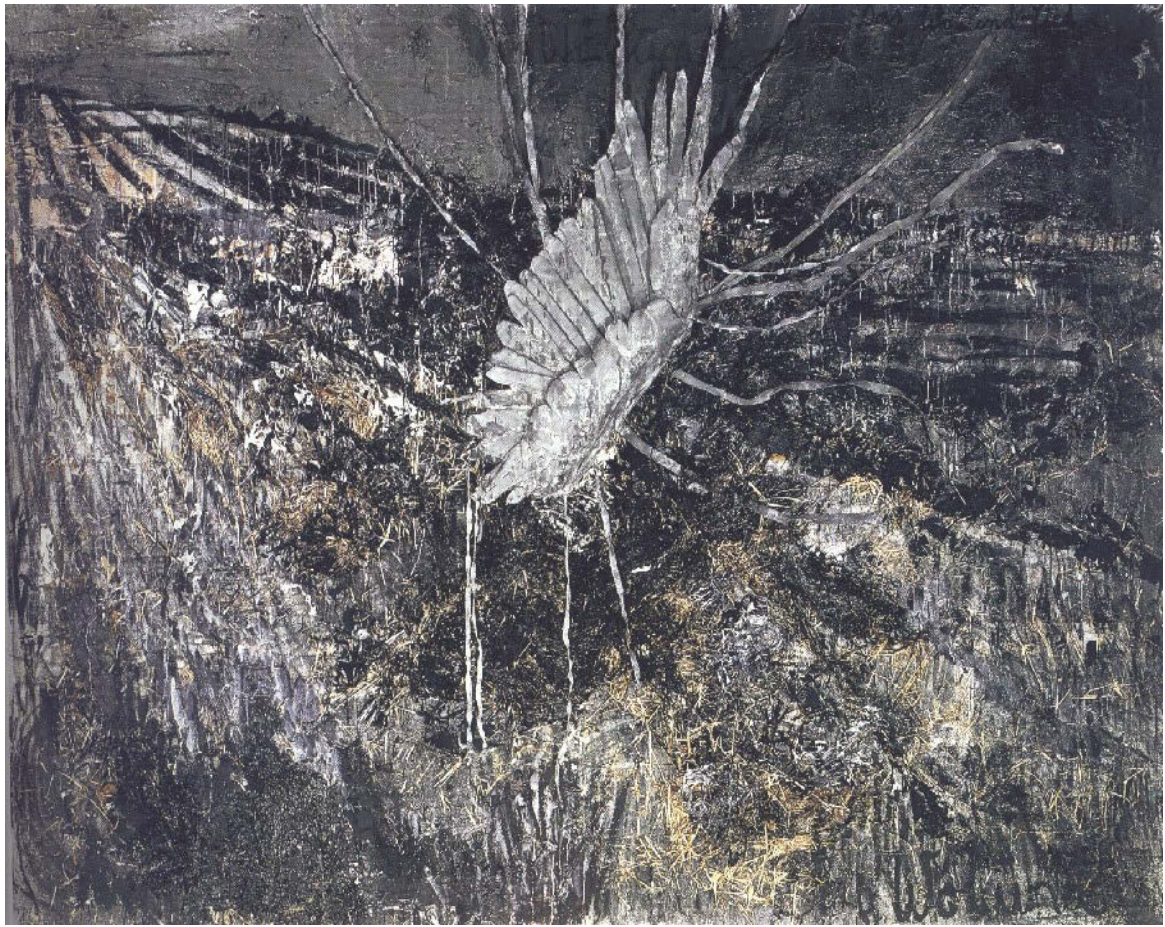
Pic. 26. Wach im Zigeunerlager und wach im Wüstenzelt. Es rinnt uns der Sand aus den Haaren, 1997, 280 x 560 cm



27. Des Malers Schutzengel, 1975, 130 x 150, 5 cm



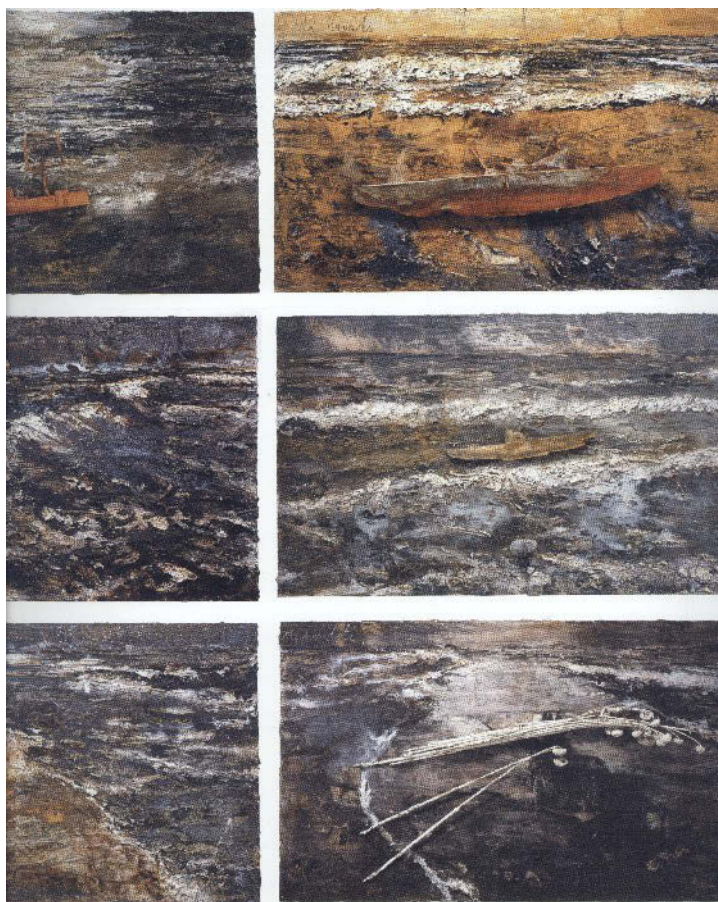
Pic. 28. Regina im Caelum Assumpta



Pic. 29. Wayland's Song, 1982, 280 x 380 cm



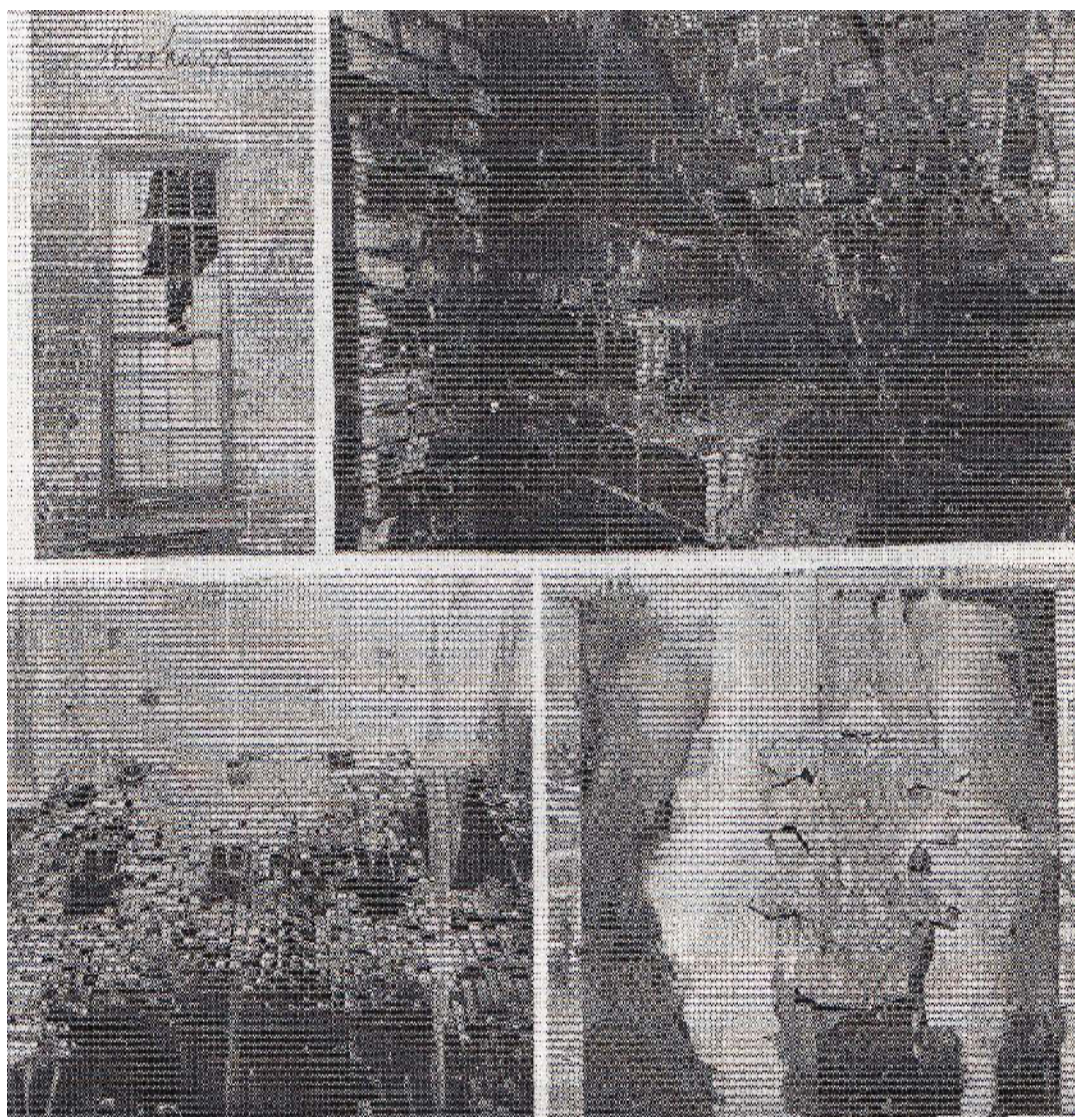
Pic. 30. Voyage au bout de la nuit (Voyage to the end of Night), 2006



Pic. 31. Velimir Khlebnikov, 2004

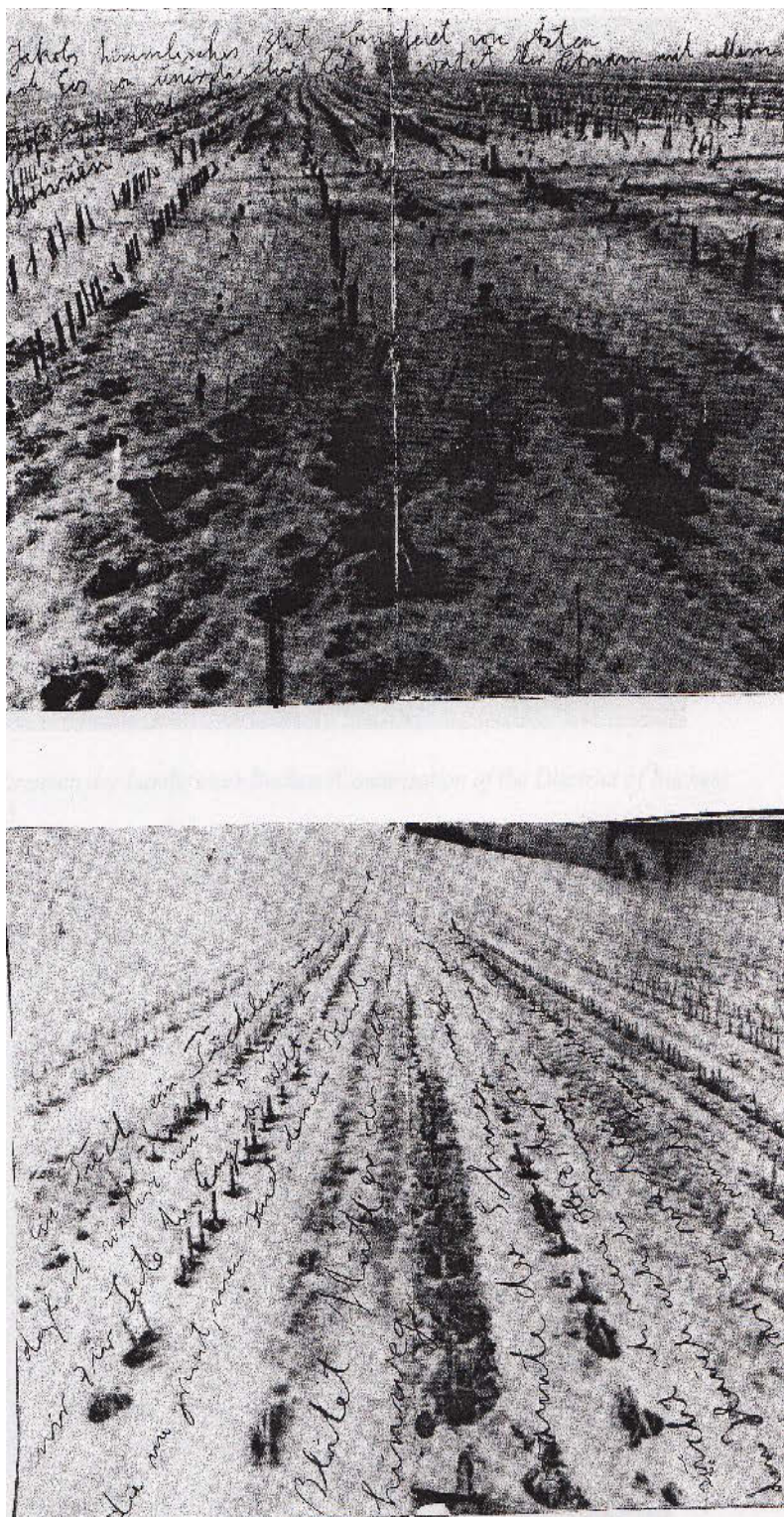


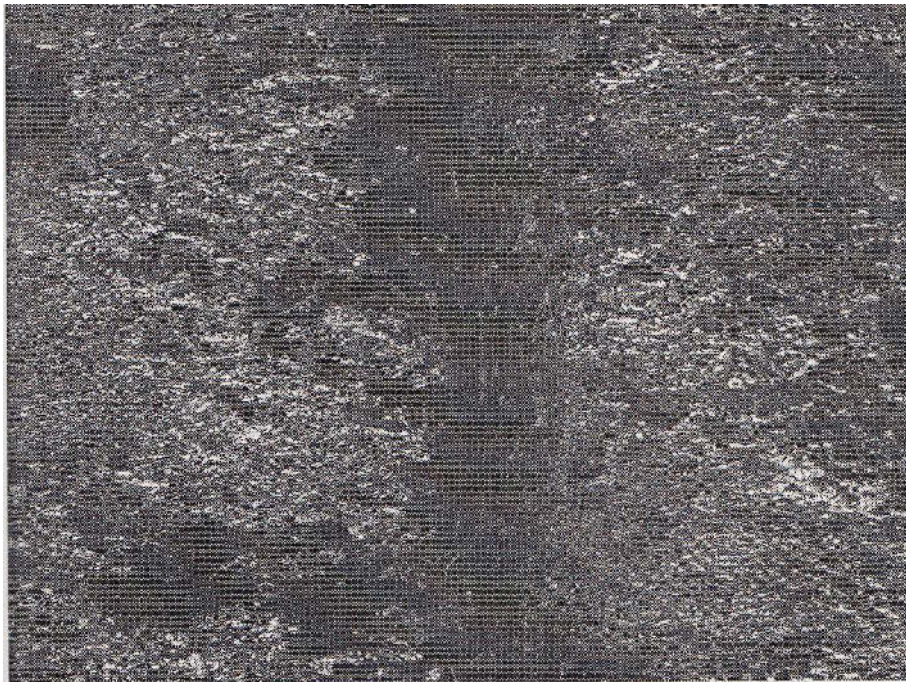
Pic. 32. Lilith at the Red Sea, 1990, 280 x 625 cm



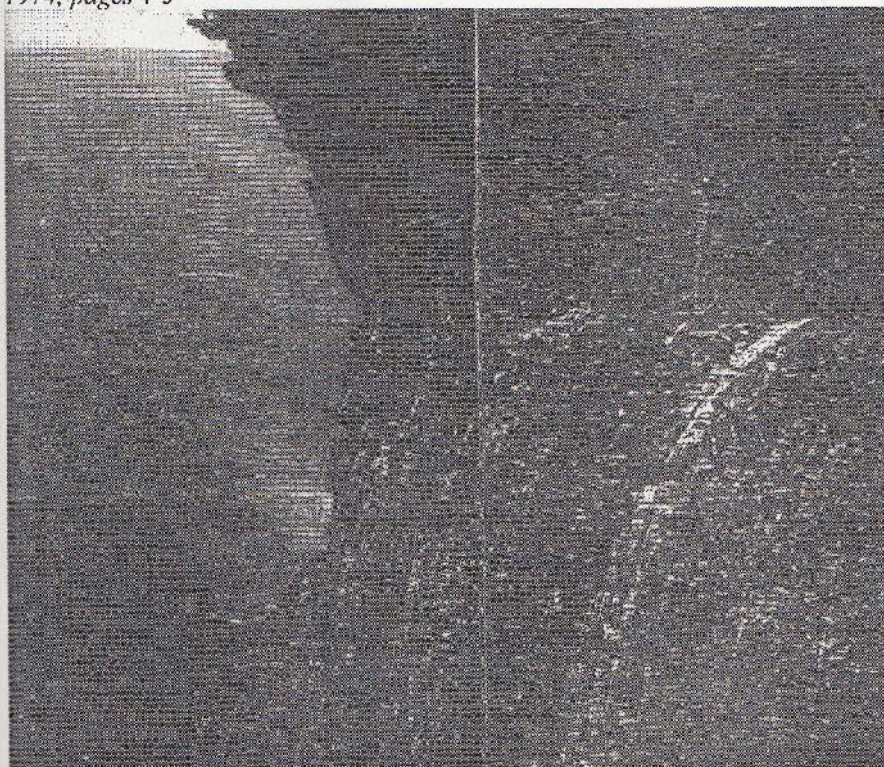
Pic. 33. Merkawa

Pic. 34. Lied von der Zeder – für Paul Celan

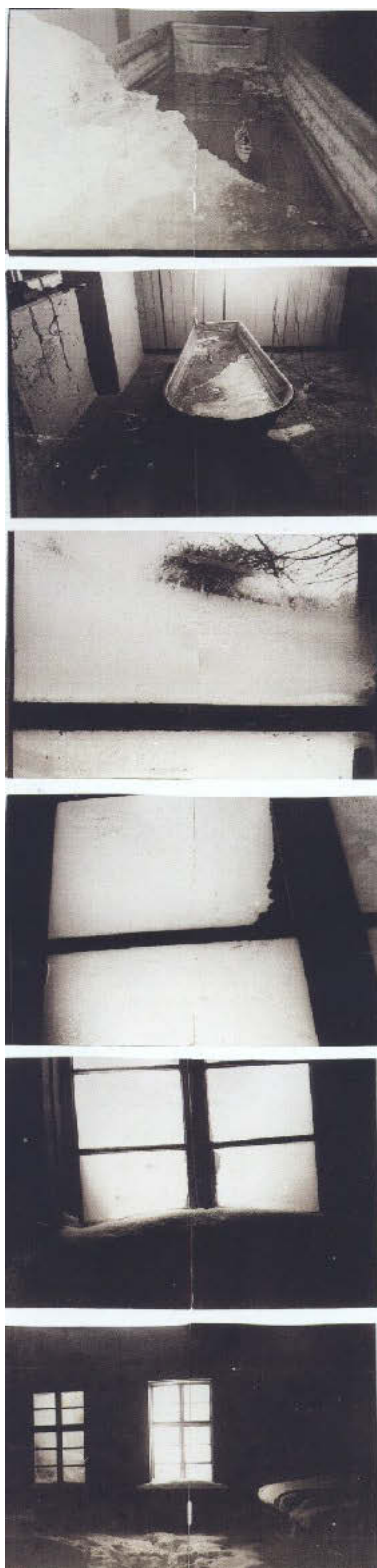




Pic. 35. a. Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen (Cauterisation of the Disctrict of Buchen), 1974, pages 4-5



Pic. 35. b. Ausbrennen des Landkreises Buchen (Cauterisation of the Disctrict of Buchen), 1974, pages 156-157



Pic. 36. Piet Mondrian, "Operation See-lion," 1975



a.



b.

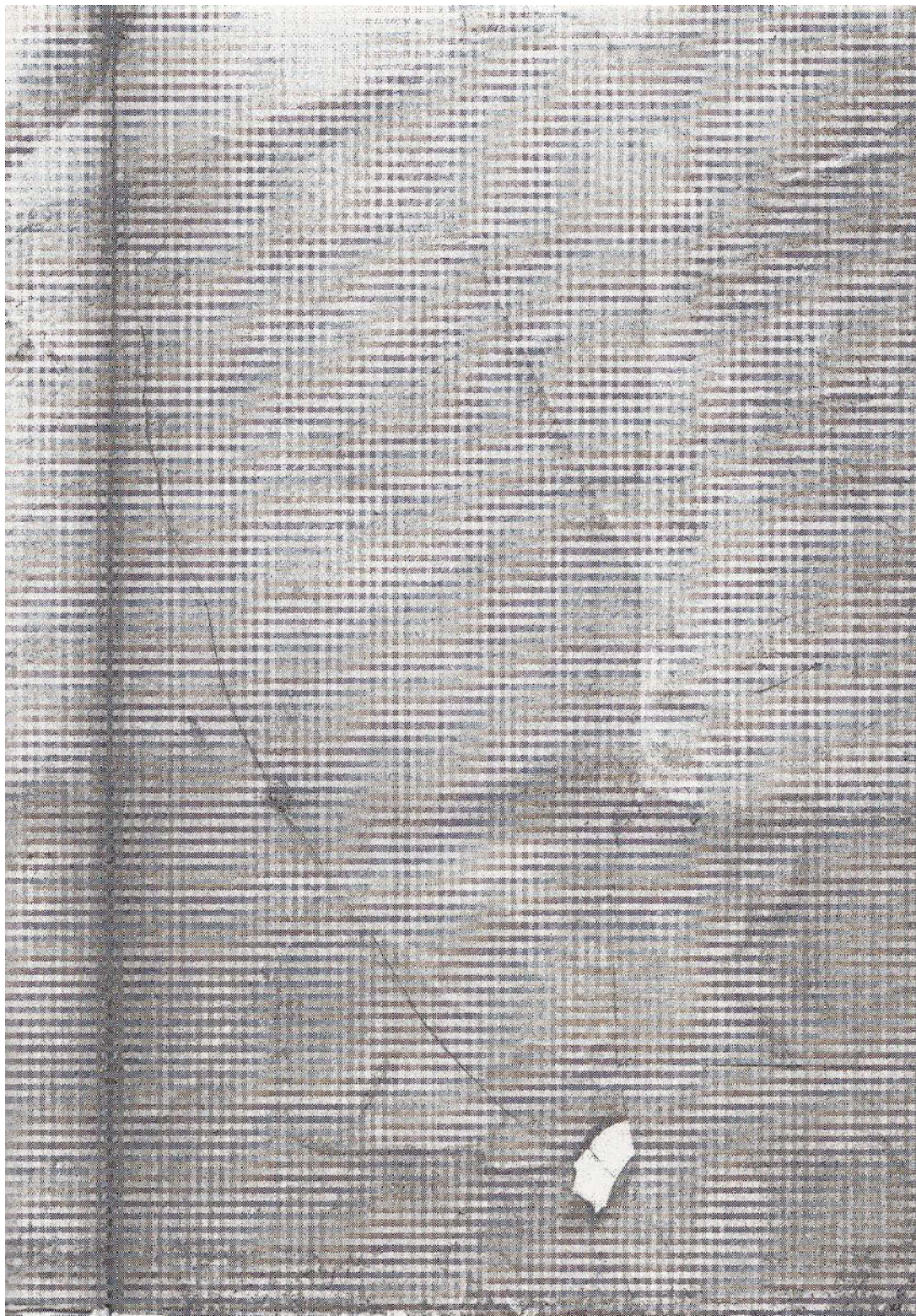
Pic. 37. March Sand IV, 1976, 10-11, 40-41

Pic. 38.Sulamith



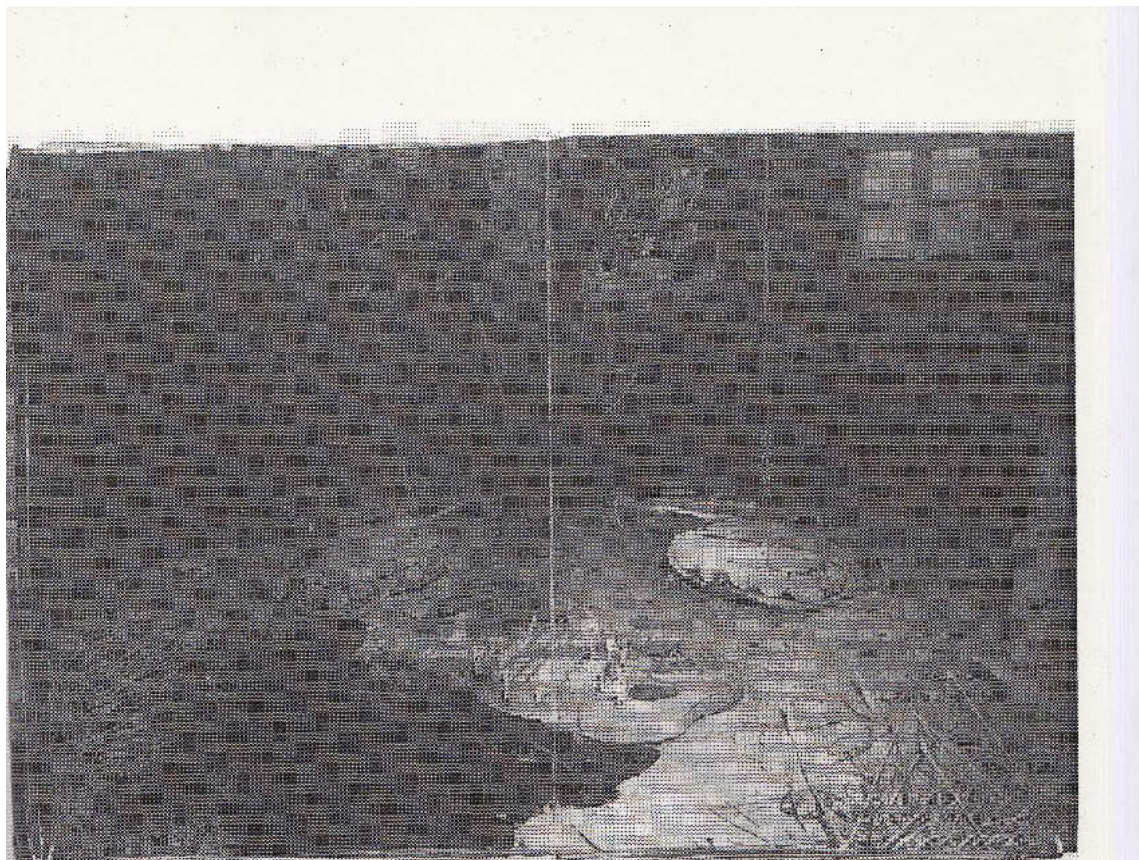
Pic. 39. Lilith's Daughters



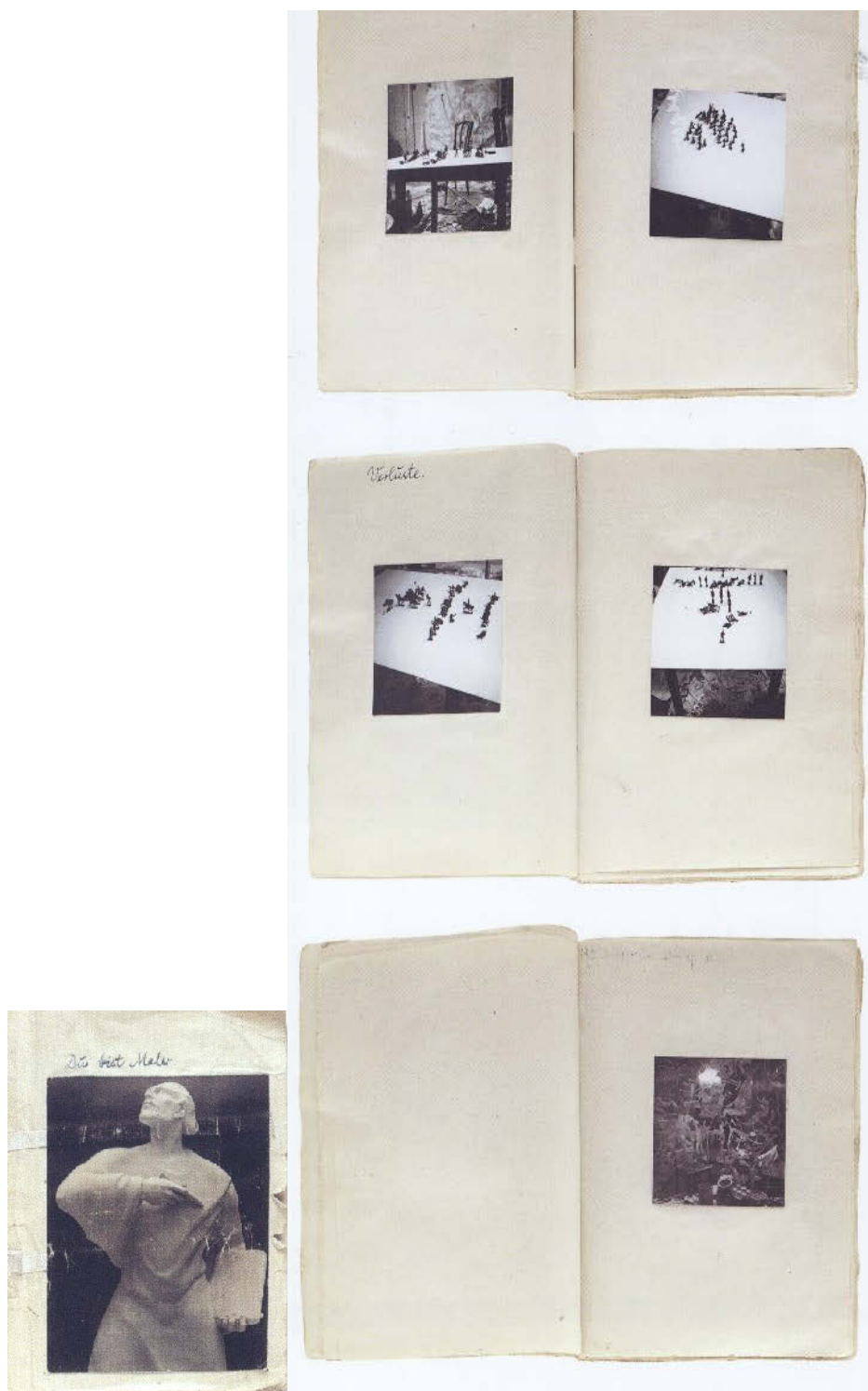


Pic. 40. Isis and Osiris, 1987, pp. 2-3

Pic. 41. Art book Bilderstreit, 1980, pp. 28-29

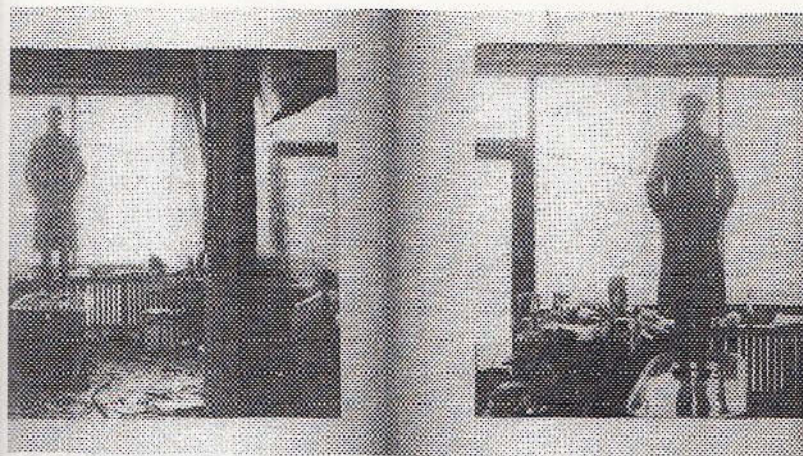


Pic. 41. Bilderstreit, Iconoclastic controversy, II, 1980, pp. 28-29

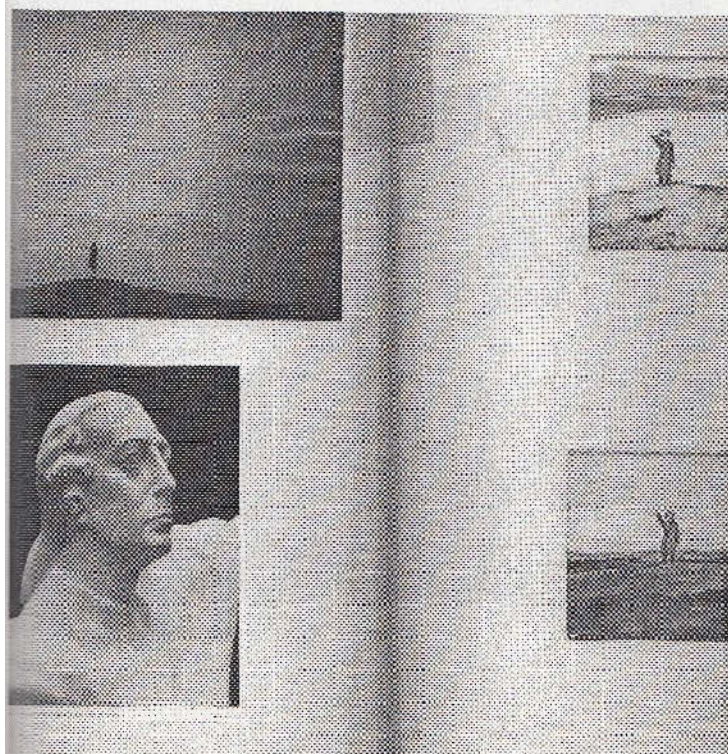


Pic. 42. Du bist Maler, 1969

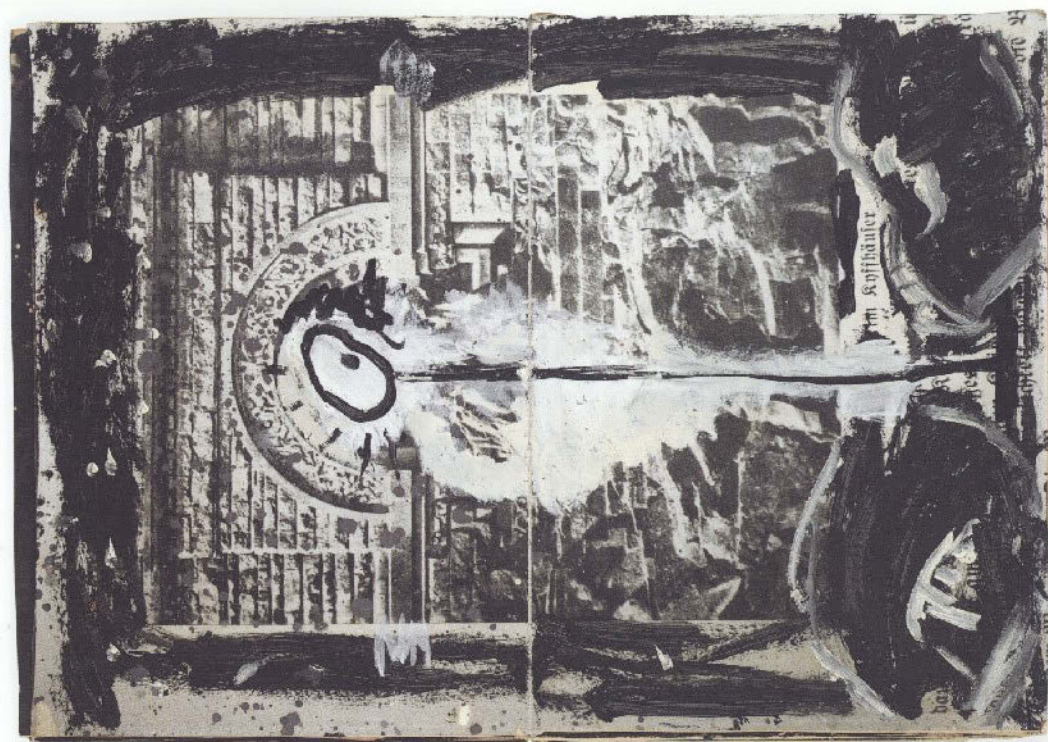
Pic. 43. Heroic Symbols a., b



Pic. 43. a. Heroic Symbols, 1969



b.

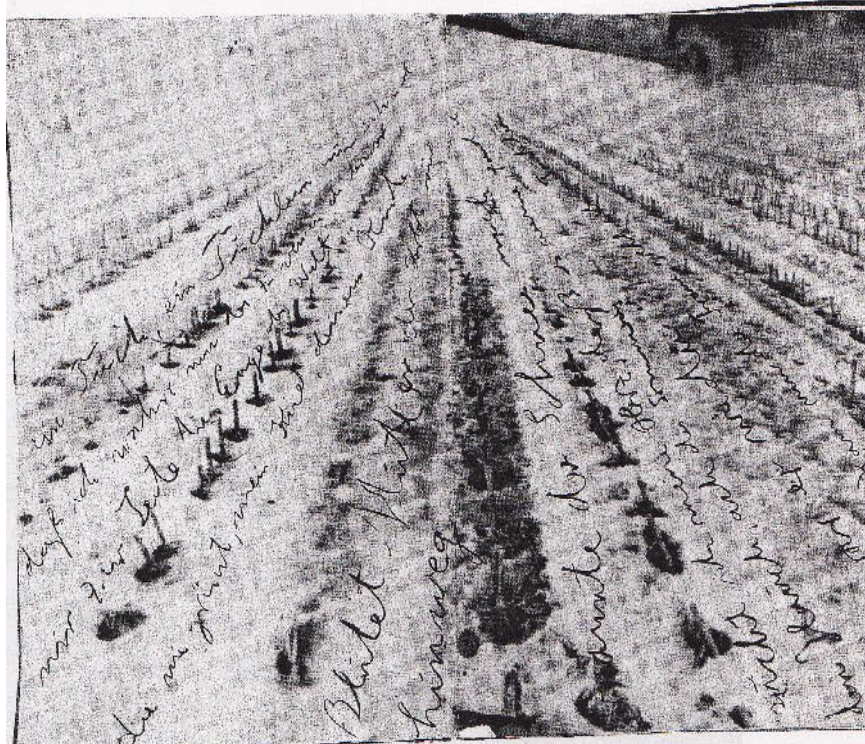
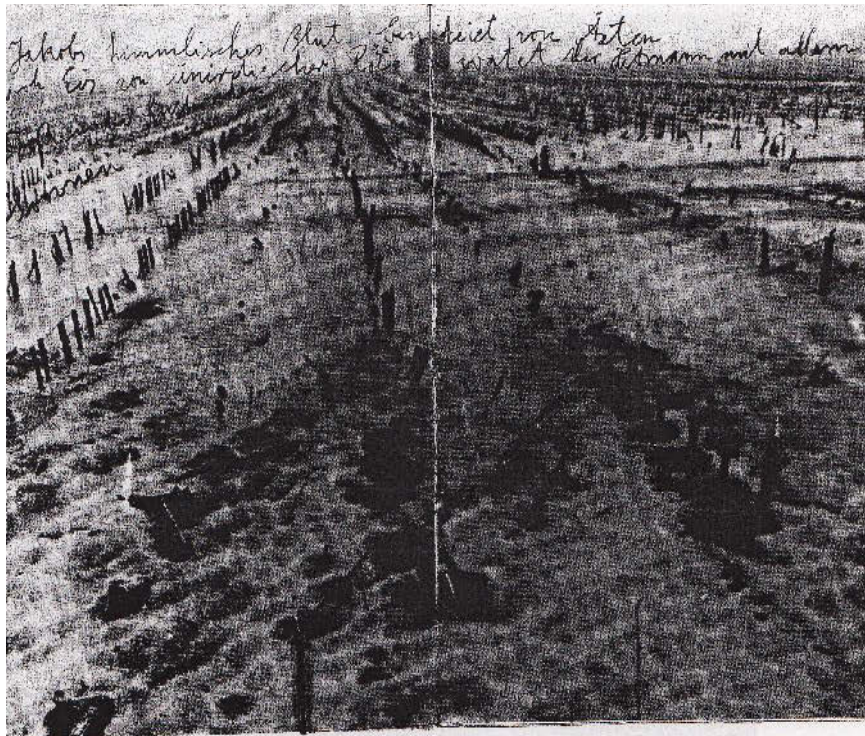


Pic. 44. Kyffhäuser, 1980, pp. 28-29 and pp. 30-31



Pic. 45. Das Deutsche Volksgesicht, Kohle für 2000 Jahre, German Face, Coal for 2000 Years 1974 pp. 86-87, 92-93

Pic. 46. Paul Celan – Jakob's himmlisches Blut benedeiet von Äxten





Pic. 47. Espenbaum - für Paul Celan, 2005, oil, emulsion, acrylic, charcoal, plaster, resin, hair, lead string, branches on canvas, 190 x 280 cm



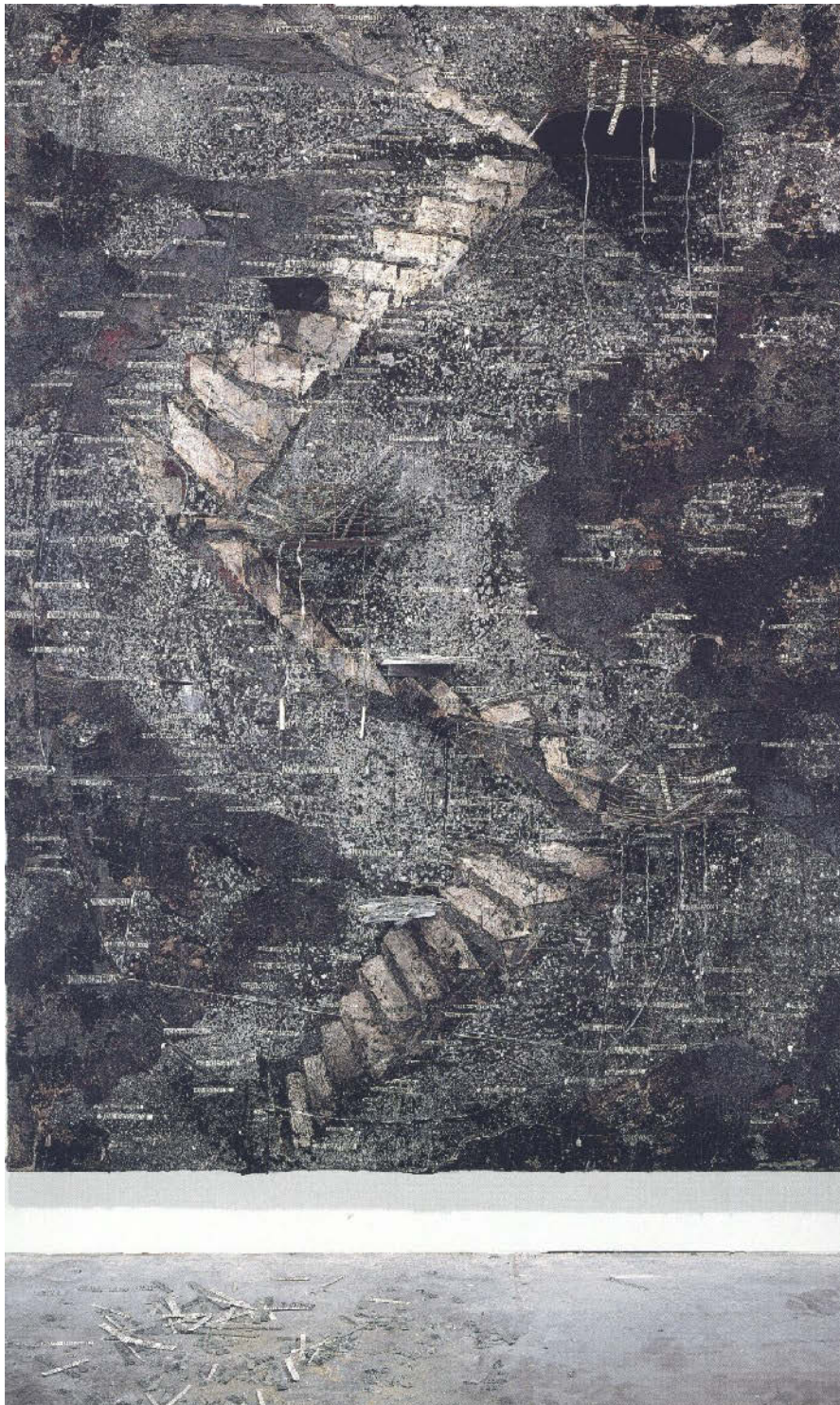
Pic. 48. Die Sefiroth, 1996, 330 x 180 cm



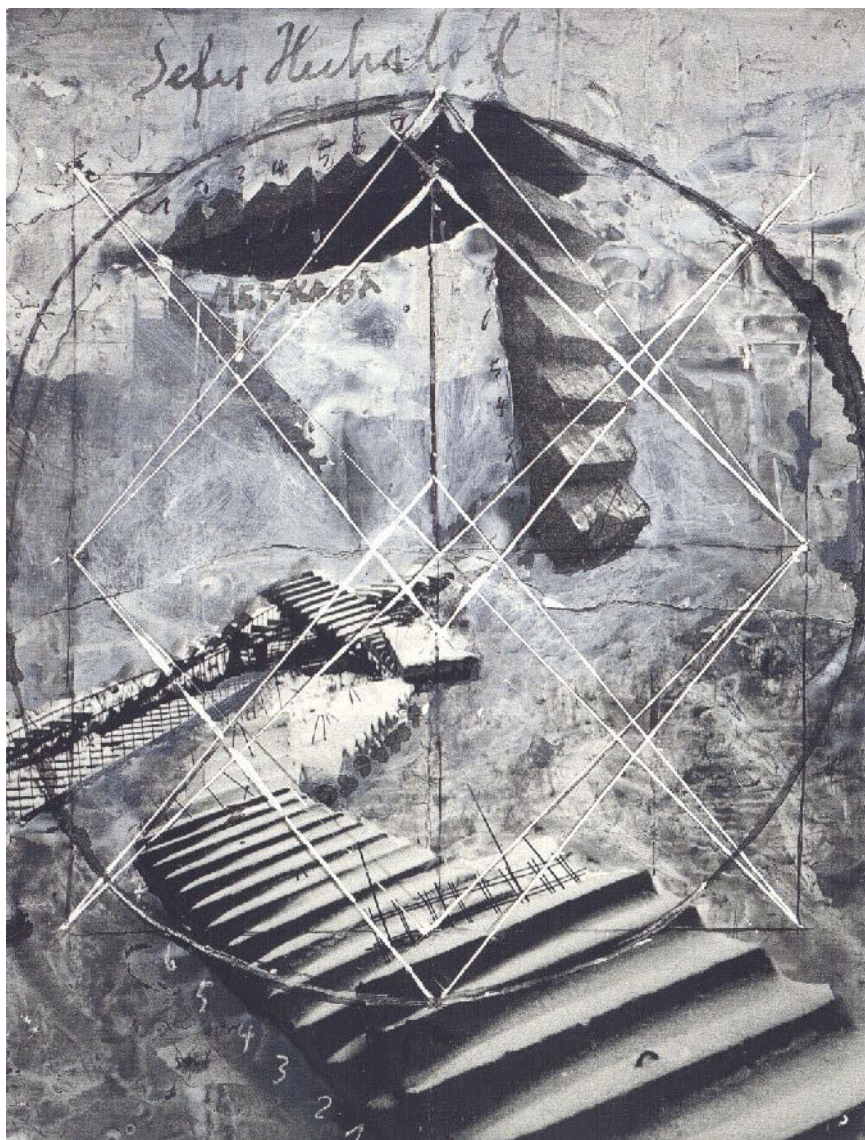
Pic. 49. Die Entfaltung der Sefiroth (The Unfolding of Sefiroth), 1985- 1988, 340 x 690 cm



Pic. 50. Zim-Zum



Pic. 51. Himmelsleiter (Heavenly Stair) 2002, 380 x 280 cm



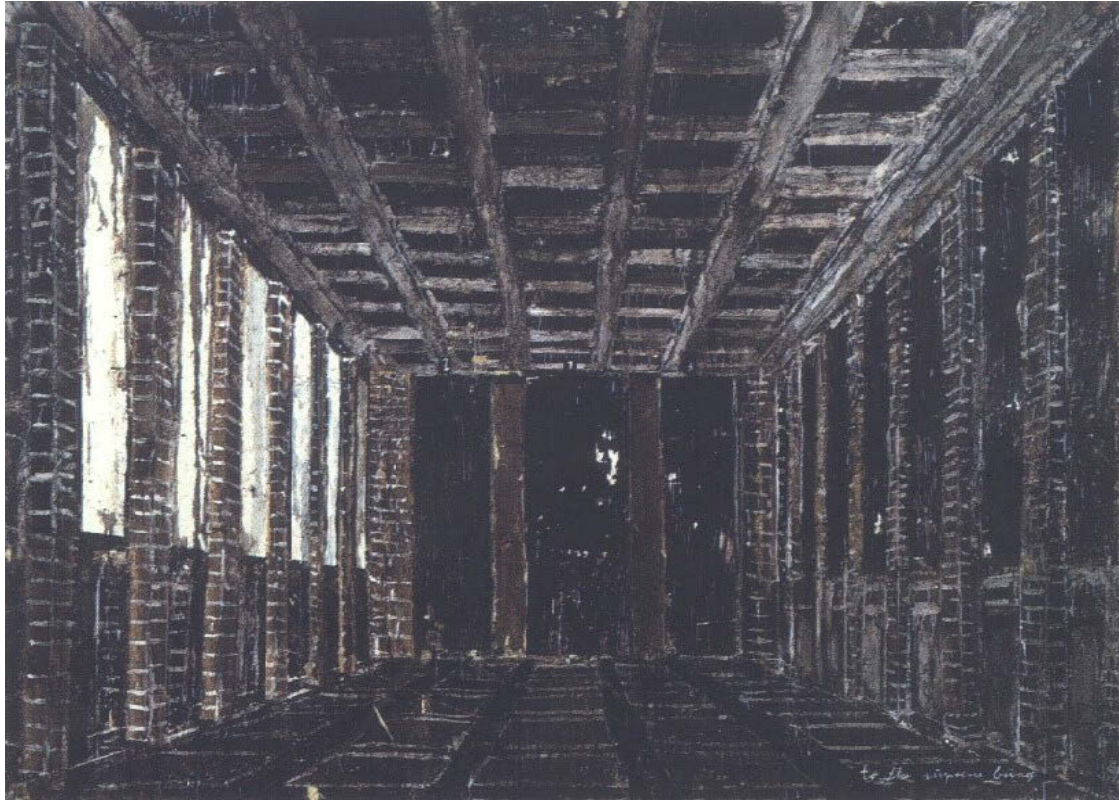
Pic. 52. Sefer Hechalot, 2002, 112 x 88 cm



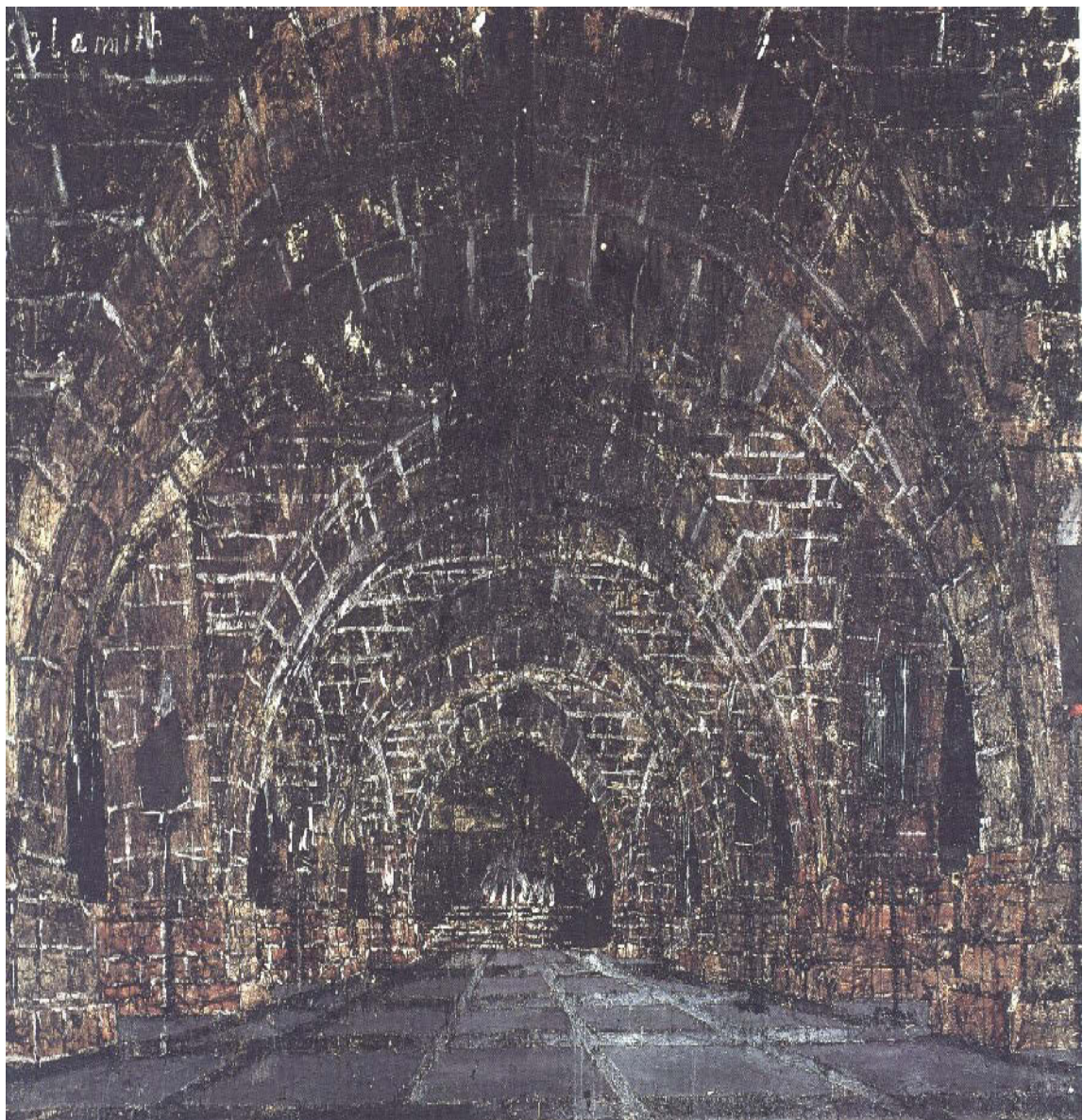
Pic. 53. Jericho, Royal Academy inner court, London, 2007



Pic. 54. Innenraum (Interior), 1981, 287 x 311 cm



Pic. 55. To the Supreme Being, 1983, 278 x 368



Pic.56. Sulamith, 1983, 290 x 370 cm



Pic. 57. Sonnenschiff



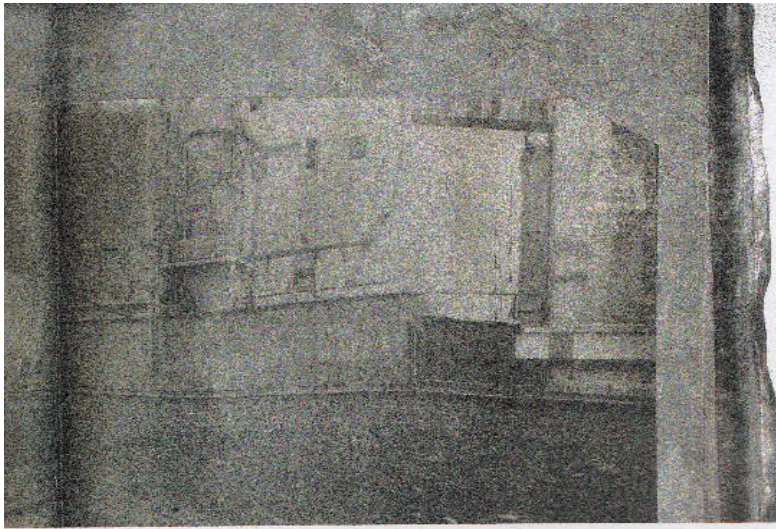
Pic. 58. Palm Sunday, 2007



Pic. 59. Geheimnis der Farne, 2006



Pic. 60. Zweistromland – the High Priestess, 1985-1989



Pic. 61. Book # 24, 1985-1989, of the sculpture Zweistromland - The High Priestess



Pic. 62. Starfall, 1998

